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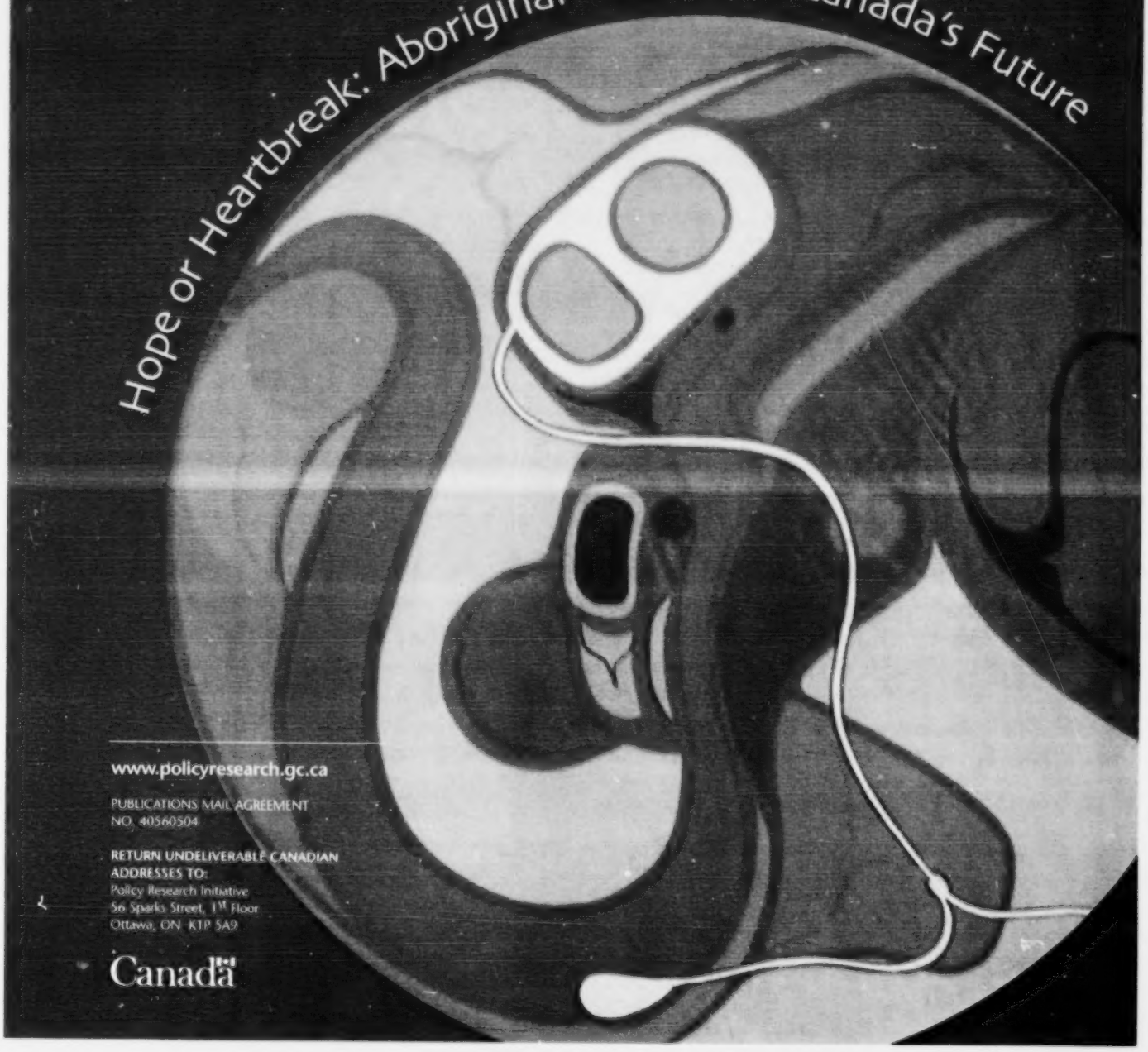
Hope or Heartbreak: Aboriginal Youth and Canada's Future



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Sonny Assu

Laich-kwil-tach from the Wei Wai Kai (Cape Mudge) band

Sonny Assu is one of Canada's most promising emerging artists. He combines contemporary aesthetics with traditional Northwest Coast form-line and design. His paintings and sculptures experiment with notions of commodification and the ready-made, but are a critique of contemporary culture. "I am a product of pop culture. I grew up in the age of mass media advertising and subliminal adverts" he says [but] "I am able to combine my pop roots with my traditional Laich-kwil-tach heritage." The result is an encounter with tradition that refuses to acquiesce to the stereotypes of First Nations art and artists, while respecting Native culture and addressing an urban context. "I speak to the notion of conformity by not conforming to the commonly perceived Indian identity."

For the cover illustration, the artist used a traditional deer hide drum as "canvas" to create the tongue-in-cheek *iDrum: Hotel California*. "The drums have been a big part of my life. They were the first items I learned how to create traditionally." The painting illustrates the juxtaposition of polarized cultures. The iDrum series speaks about how we use icons and objects of pop-culture as totemic representation. The work disseminates the ideals behind personal totems and how pop-objects/icons influence our contemporary linage.

When asked *Why Hotel California?* Sonny's answer was simple. "It has Eagles on it."

< http://sonnyassu.com >

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Hope or Heartbreak

Aboriginal Youth and Canada's Future

Thomas Townsend
Executive Head
Policy Research Initiative

Michael Wernick
Deputy Minister
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

Aboriginal youth under the age of 25 represent more than half of the Aboriginal population in Canada today.

The significance of this demographic reality takes on even more importance when contrasted with the current aging of the general Canadian population. The juxtaposition of a rapidly growing young Aboriginal population and an aging baby-boom cohort in the general population represents both a unique policy challenge and a unique opportunity for Canada.

In the years to come, all orders of government will be pressed to make necessary adjustments for providing the appropriate mix of services required to support an aging population, while simultaneously focusing on the development and renewal of a shrinking labour force. Investments in youth – Aboriginal youth in particular – will be critical to successfully address these challenges.

New generations of young Aboriginal people will have the opportunity to become active participants in shaping tomorrow's society. However, the current context requires higher levels of human capital for youth to navigate the pathways to adulthood, a transition that already comes with varying degrees of uncertainty and risk. While this is true for all youth, the poor socio-economic conditions in which many First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth live create substantial additional challenges.

This special issue of *Horizons* offers many insights into the emerging trends, opportunities and policy implications related to a rapidly growing Aboriginal youth population.

This volume, which represents the culmination of over a year of close cooperation between the Policy Research Initiative (PRI) and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), was conceived under the auspices of the PRI interdepartmental research project, *Investing in Youth: Evidence from Policy, Practice and Research*. We have had the good fortune of being able to include a wide variety of Aboriginal policy research by some of the best researchers from both within and outside of government, and we hope the quality of this research work is evident.

The studies contained in this volume are timely, as are the opportunities they represent for focusing the attention of the policy research community on Aboriginal youth issues. At a time when much of current public attention regarding Canadian population trends is preoccupied with aging baby-boomers, dwindling rural communities and struggling new Canadians, the phenomenal growth of the Aboriginal population has flown under the radar.

But the numbers are clear. As Jeremy Hull's study shows, between 2001 and 2026 more than 600,000 Aboriginal youth will turn 15, including more than 100,000 in each of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. This growth represents a massive influx into the working-age population, particularly in Saskatchewan, where it is projected that by 2026, fully 36% of the population aged 15 to 29 will be Aboriginal.

We know that there have been considerable improvements in the socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal

peoples over the past two decades. As noted in the article by Guimond and Cooke, progress has been observed among the Registered Indian population with respect to their basic educational attainment, life expectancy, and standard of living. The Hull article adds that Aboriginal students are moving from high school to post-secondary education in greater numbers, while the papers by Norris, Coley and Tulloch suggest emerging evidence that Aboriginal youth are asserting themselves as future stewards of their communities and their cultures in the 21st century. These are all important developments, and should be celebrated.

Yet in spite of these improvements, there are still too many Aboriginal youth – and in particular Registered Indian and Inuit youth – who continue to lag behind other young Canadians in terms of post-secondary educational attainment, physical and mental health, and employment prospects. Clement's article, for example, shows how the gap between Registered Indians and other Canadians is widening, not closing, in terms of university completion. The article by Guimond and Robitaille finds unacceptably high rates of teen pregnancy. And as shown by Norris, many Aboriginal people are – even as we write these words – witnessing the extinction of their traditional Aboriginal languages.

Many of the difficulties observed here are rooted in a number of factors, notably the effects of intergenerational transmission of poverty, and geographical barriers to attending post-secondary institutions that are often located far away from Aboriginal communities. However, the article by Chandler and Lalonde also reminds us that these phenomena cannot be viewed simply as "Aboriginal problems," for the very good reason that tremendous differences exist among Aboriginal communities in terms of social outcomes. These variances – among communities and identity groups – hold important lessons that policy researchers would be wise to heed.

We know that Inuit and other northern Aboriginal youth are watching as their communities undergo radical cultural, environmental and economic change, and we know that they want to do their part to ensure that their communities will continue to thrive in the 21st century. We know, too, that Métis youth wish to continue to assert their place in Canadian society in a context of improved recognition of Métis peoples' rights and heritage. Increasing numbers of Aboriginal youth will find themselves working and raising families in large cities, while striving to maintain or re-establish ties to their communities and traditional cultures. And we can say with some certainty that increasing numbers of First Nations youth will find themselves without Registered Indian status, with the inherent implications in terms of access to certain services.

Through the course of this project, we gained a new appreciation for the limitations placed on researchers by the lack of data and information. While we note that many factors (political feasibility, affordability, jurisdictional constraints) come into play in policy deliberations, it is essential to continue to build a strong

multi-disciplinary and policy-relevant foundation of knowledge on Aboriginal issues.

We would also be remiss were we not to acknowledge from the outset that this volume only scratches the surface.

There are many untapped lessons to be learned from successful initiatives by and for Aboriginal youth in communities across the country that are having a positive influence.

While we examined a vast array of topics, there are many others that we did not address. For example, we were unable to delve into the many important research and policy questions surrounding the use of Aboriginal child and youth welfare services; or the social and economic impacts and costs of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder on individuals, families, and their communities; or, the poverty-health nexus. We also know, as noted by Brant Castellano, that there are many untapped lessons to be learned from successful initiatives by and for Aboriginal youth in communities across the country that are having a positive influence. Obviously, if we are going to develop appropriate policies and programs to deal with the issues that affect the well-being of Aboriginal youth, these knowledge gaps need to be addressed through more expansive research efforts in the future.

Of course, while INAC is already taking a leadership role in addressing key gaps with respect to Aboriginal policy research, it is not working in isolation. There are also at least two dozen other federal departments and agencies, as well as academic think-tanks and Aboriginal organizations themselves that are engaged in the creation of knowledge regarding Aboriginal issues. Bridging and linking these diverse research activities on a horizontal basis is paramount, and both INAC and the PRI are prepared to work together collaboratively towards that particular objective.

In short, we know that the journey facing Aboriginal youth in the years to come will have significant importance for the future of Canada, in terms of well-being, social cohesion and economic prosperity. And we fully embrace our responsibility as policy-makers to use the levers at our disposal to ensure that young Aboriginal people in Canada have the opportunities, skills, and tools they need to chart their own course. We must enable them to continue redefining and reaffirming Aboriginal peoples' place at the heart of the Canadian project. We recognize that to do otherwise might condemn another generation of Aboriginal youth to the margins of our society.

Finally, we also know that to achieve this objective, we in government need to do our homework. And yes, this means investing in high-quality, cutting-edge policy research. Aboriginal youth deserve nothing less.

Reflections on Identity and Empowerment

Recurring Themes in the Discourse on and with Aboriginal Youth

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and
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Royal Commission of
Aboriginal Peoples

The invitation to contribute to this special issue of *Horizons* was framed in terms of providing an intergenerational perspective on issues affecting Aboriginal youth. I have taken the opportunity to reflect on 50 years of experience with children and youth as a social worker in family and children's services, as a mother, a grandmother, a participant in First Nations' community life, a university teacher, a research director with the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and, most recently, as an adviser and writer on residential school healing and research ethics. My comments are not consistently situated in current research, but they do weave together learning from many sources.

My first published article was entitled "Vocation or Identity: The Dilemma of Indian Youth." That was in 1970. More than 30 years later, I was called on to review Ph.D. dissertations by Aboriginal students exploring the same theme, with the titles "Participation without Integration" (DeGagné, 2002) and "Aboriginal Identity in Urban Areas" (Restoule, 2004).

Youthful participants in these small qualitative studies provide insight into the experiences contributing to broader trends. Participants report that high school, in particular, is a major site of identity struggle, that they feel disconnected from the curriculum and the school environment, and uneasy about "leaving behind" peers and relatives if they achieve too much. Many report an urge to take control of their lives, even if it means taking to the road with a knapsack.

On a broader scale such feelings and consequent decisions are reflected in statistics that indicate half of Registered Indians in the 20 to 24 age bracket have left school without a graduation diploma.[1] Relative to the Canadian youth population, male Aboriginal youth have disproportionately high rates of incarceration and suicide; Registered Indian girls in their teen years bear children at six times the rate of teenagers in the general population.[2] While these figures apply to the Registered Indian population, other measures of well-being indicate significant and persistent disparities between the Métis and Inuit and the Canadian population in general.

The young people in the qualitative studies mentioned above have embraced their Aboriginal identity. They have traversed or are traversing the risks of adolescence. A few come from emotionally and economically stable backgrounds, but most face the same challenges as their less educated and less articulate peers: fragmented families, absent fathers, low income, multiple changes of residence, personal experience with alcohol abuse, and dropping out of school periodically, beginning in their mid-teens. Their stories, and the stories of other Aboriginal youth I have encountered in my own journey, illuminate the core of resilience that resides within them and how it is nurtured. More than refining descriptors of disadvantage, our policy research and intervention strategies need to engage with that core.

The Tasks of Adolescence

The ground-breaking work of Michael Chandler and Christopher Lalonde[3] on suicide among First Nations youth has done an additional service. It has reminded us that Aboriginal youth

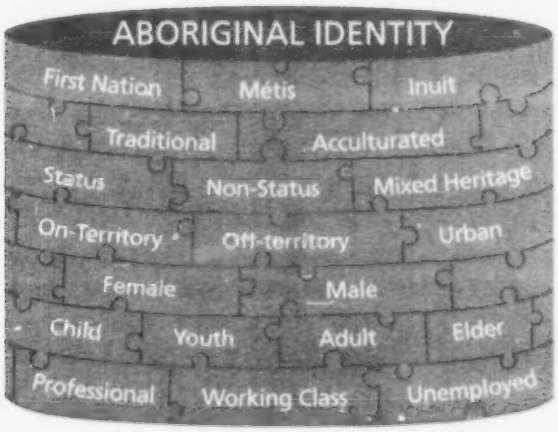
are, after all, adolescents going through the same turbulent changes as other contemporary youth, asking and seeking answers to the questions: Who am I? Who do I want to be? What do I want to hold onto from the person that I was yesterday?

Becoming their own person means trying on different identities, making sense of the world in their own way, trying things their parents never even imagined. Still, youth don't write these life scripts and play them out in a social and emotional vacuum. They have learned things and how to do things from their parents. They look to their peers who have had similar formative influences. They acquire skills and credentials in school. And in privileged circumstances, if their experiments in living don't work out, they have the option of going home, gathering their resources and launching out again.

Many Aboriginal youth lack some or all of these supports. As work has moved away from the land and the family unit, young men no longer have the opportunity for a lengthy apprenticeship with older relations modelling economic skills and personal competencies. There is greater continuity in women's roles, but both male and female youth are encouraged to look to education to prepare them for adult responsibility. In addition to social change, which blurs the contours of adult identity, youth also have to deal with stereotypes, low expectations and incidents of outright racism in their encounters with non-Aboriginal society.

Development of a mature sense of self is further complicated by the increasing diversity within Aboriginal communities as represented in Figure 1. The blond First Nation child may deal with bullying in the schoolyard, because he does not look sufficiently Indian to belong. The Métis youth in a family that only recently acknowledged its roots may be both relieved and anxious at having her personal history redefined. The urban Aboriginal youth who becomes an abstainer out of respect for ceremonial protocol will probably face ridicule from his former buddies.

FIGURE 1
Complexities of Aboriginal Identity



Historic Trauma

In addition to confronting discontinuities in their personal experience, Aboriginal youth also have to bridge the historic distance between their people and the dominant, surrounding society.

Dr. Clare Brant, the first psychiatrist of Aboriginal origin in Canada, had remarkable success in working with angry, alienated and self-destructive young men referred by the courts. He related that in his practice the first real communication from these young men was often something like: "You killed the buffalo. You stole our land. You can't help me!"[4] Clare's response to that accusation shifted the dialogue to a different plane.

I wondered as I heard that story: How can truant teenagers in the wilds of London, Ontario grieve about the loss of lands that occurred generations before they were born? Research sponsored by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation highlighted the dynamics of historic trauma transmission over generations (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, 2004). The shocks of epidemics, displacement from lands, depleted food supply, suppression of ceremonies and languages, and the loss of children to residential schools

and child welfare agencies reverberate through tight knit communities, provoking adaptive and maladaptive responses. These responses become embedded in the collective memory and are passed on in oral narratives, shaping perceptions and behaviour in successive generations. When the shocks follow one another without intervals for recovery, pain and dysfunction are laid down layer upon layer and the original causes and effects become obscured.

When the shocks follow one another without intervals for recovery, pain and dysfunction are laid down layer upon layer and the original causes and effects become obscured.

Community initiatives to heal the legacy of residential school abuse demonstrate repeatedly that collective remembering is a first step to placing historic trauma in perspective and reorienting one's approach on the future (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2006). An Inuit student at Trent University, in a course on comparative international development, was deeply moved by learning about the history and social-economic disadvantage of indigenous peoples around the world. He told his instructor: "The young people in my village should hear this. They believe that the trouble in their lives is their fault" (Tookoome, 1989).

Mediated Learning

Youth are also prone to blame their parents for failing them. One criticism levelled at Aboriginal parents is that they do not reinforce the importance of school attendance and achievement. That is a widespread misconception contradicted by research that consistently reports the desire of parents to see that their children have an education that will secure a better future. Parents who themselves have little formal education may have a limited repertoire of skills to pass on to their children to promote success in school. A young woman speaking to an RCAP public hearing recalled standing anxiously at the roadside waiting for the school bus on the first day of school, her hair braided, wearing red ribbons. Her mother reassured and admonished her: "You will be all right, Sherry Lynn. And remember – try to act like them."[5]

Successful Aboriginal students become proficient at playing the appropriate part in a world that is alien to them. A university student in DeGagné's research reported:

> We studied major British writers, Shakespeare and Spencer and Chaucer and all that stuff and I thought it was pretty weird because...once I stepped into that room, once I saw the professor... I knew what he was going to talk about. I went into this medieval feeling inside of myself and the whole room seemed to change... and it was exciting to be in that sort of place.[6]

Entering a make-believe world may work as a learning strategy, but without the links that add meaning in everyday life, the learning and that part of the self that engages in it are in danger of becoming split off from the whole.

Children and youth who are told implicitly and explicitly that what they know from their upbringing is of no value come to distrust their own competence as well as the knowledge of those on whom they have depended. They may be driven to interrupt formal learning until they have worked through developmental tasks. Adult education programs available in a later phase have particular appeal and effectiveness precisely because they acknowledge and build on lived experience as a base for exploring new worlds.

Aboriginal educators Lorna Williams (2000) and Bill Mussell (2005) argue that the chasm between experiential learning and school experience does not have to be endured, with the failure and self-doubt that follow. *Mediated learning* proposes that research-based interventions can assist young people at any stage to acquire tools to make sense of complex environments just as they normally do through the mediation of parents who interpret meanings verbally, emotionally, and through their behaviour.

Statistical evidence indicates that a high proportion, perhaps 50 percent, of Aboriginal youth continue to drop out of high school before graduation, often engaging in high-risk behaviours. Many of those who leave school early, especially males,

FIGURE 2
Anishnabe Path of Life

become underemployed, marginalized adults. Those who resume formal learning in their 20s attest to the critical need for making secondary education more affirming of Aboriginal identity development and making broadly accessible the avenues for engaging and re-engaging with learning when youth are ready to do so.

Avenues to Support Empowerment

A core principle of pedagogy in a number of First Nations traditions is that knowledge must be earned. That is, teaching received at one level must be practised, and responsible use of the knowledge must be demonstrated before the learner is ready to progress to the next level.

The RCAP Report cited empowerment as a central preoccupation of youth appearing before the Commission. Understood in context, empowerment is the progressive acquisition of knowledge and the ability to put it to use for the good of the community. "Agency," the power to make things happen, may be a better word to describe the process because it does not imply turning over authority regardless of the recipient's readiness to use it effectively. In the past, traditional practices for socializing youth channelled their tendencies toward risk taking through hunting and raiding parties and age-grade societies which ceremonially marked transitions to maturity. In the present, as in the past, elders are the pre-eminent wisdom keepers while practical applications of cultural knowledge are learned by observing competent adults, in psychologist Erik Erikson's terms, people "who know things and know how to do things" (1968: 125).

Another teaching common to varied traditions directs attention to the path of life, which follows a course from east to west, marked by many turning points and diversions that lead to dead ends. Staying on the path leads ultimately to old age and wisdom before return to the spirit world. A symbol of the Anishnabe path of life is represented in Figure 2.

A substantial body of evidence already exists to guide policy that supports identity development and agency of Aboriginal youth. Review, analysis, and case examples underpinning recommendations are available in the RCAP Report (1996), Senate Standing Committee reports on urban Aboriginal youth (2003) and mental health (2006), the Blueprint on Aboriginal Health prepared for the Kelowna First Ministers Meeting (2005), recommendations of the First Nations and Inuit Mental Wellness Advisory Committee (2006)[7] and the Final Report of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2006).

The 10th anniversary of the RCAP Report has passed. In the interim, studies year after year confirm RCAP's analysis of issues and reveal the partial and irregular progress being made in addressing social inequities and broadening opportunities for youth. In the RCAP Report, sports and recreation were seen as an important vehicle for promoting leadership qualities and an ethic of community service. Youth exchange programs between communities and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth were recommended to break down isolation and communication barriers.

The RCAP Report argued that youth issues could not be treated in isolation from the larger challenges of education, justice, health, and economic development. The Report emphasized that involvement of youth in effecting change was essential and recommended that the diversity of cultures and social realities could best be accommodated by local authority to adapt program initiatives. The Report identified ongoing jurisdictional debates as a major impediment to sustained, co-ordinated responses to youth needs. A key recommendation was the development of a

Canada-wide policy framework that could guide the work of federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal agencies in their own spheres and provide a basis for periodic evaluation.

There have been positive developments in the past decade.[8] Educational levels of the Aboriginal population have risen and more than 20,000 students enroll annually in post-secondary courses. Entrepreneurs in Aboriginal communities are making their mark, as are Aboriginal artists and writers. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation has demonstrated the possibilities of supporting community-led initiatives to heal residential school trauma in diverse communities across Canada, while maintaining fiscal accountability (DeGagné, 2006). Programs to encourage youth mentorship and attention to youth needs in cultural centres and urban environments have been launched.

Despite the good news, there are disturbing trends. Statistics reported by Guimond and Cooke in this issue of *Horizons* indicate that while standards of education, health, and income for Aboriginal youth have improved, the gap in the quality of life relative to Canadians as a whole remains wide. In terms of income, the gap is widening and Aboriginal men are falling behind Aboriginal women in educational attainment.

For a moment in 2005, leaders of federal, provincial and territorial governments, and national Aboriginal organizations came together at Kelowna to affirm a shared commitment to closing the gap in quality of life between Aboriginal citizens and others in Canada, but the will to move ahead collaboratively appears to have dissipated. Single provinces, including Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Ontario, have taken initiatives to recognize the presence of Aboriginal people in curriculum and as students in provincial institutions, but parallel federal initiatives are necessary to alleviate concerns about offloading responsibility and eroding treaty rights. Aboriginal communities continue to labour under the administrative burden of fragmented, short-term programs with separate reporting obligations to multiple agencies.

The features of policy required to reverse problematic trends and open doors for Aboriginal youth have become clearer in light of recent experience and research.

The features of policy required to reverse problematic trends and open doors for Aboriginal youth have become more clear in light of recent experience and research:

- Parents continue to exercise key influence on youth choices. Enhancing the health, education, and economic status of parents will carry over to improve youth well-being.
- As they explore possibilities for their own future, youth learn from the models available in their environment. Competent adults in charge of community affairs expand the range of positive choices available.
- Dropping out of high school, becoming a teenage single mother or brushes with the law do not have to be life-defining choices. Traditional teachings about the path of life emphasize that every diversion from the path offers learning for the next stage of the journey.
- Youth reach turning points where they are ready to receive advice, especially from those who are close to their age but somewhat more experienced. At various times, mentors may be peers, teachers or Elders, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal persons.
- The diversity of personal circumstances and community environments require multiple avenues for engagement, capitalizing on the priorities and resources that exist in the local situation.
- Spaces to congregate with peers, take a break from having to meet external expectations, share experience and gather information are critical to the evolution of identity whether youth are university students, budding athletes, street youth, recovering addicts, or ex-offenders.

Deflecting Aboriginal youth from life-defeating choices requires sustained, diversified, and co-ordinated initiatives mobilizing federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal government support for local action.

Alternative Futures

The demographic pyramid that foreshadows explosive growth in the Aboriginal youth population is familiar to researchers and policy makers. Justice agencies have been the most vocal about the complementary reality that youth between 15 and 29 years of age are at the highest risk of making ill-fated choices and engaging in behaviour that is harmful to themselves and disruptive to those around them. When confrontations erupt at Caledonia or Deseronto or Oka, the images of defiant figures in camouflage dress provide a seductive answer to identity dilemmas of vulnerable youth. The prospective costs of doing nothing or doing little become vivid for a day or a week in the glare of media coverage.

I conclude with a final reflection that the majority of Aboriginal youth are not about to merge into the general population and disappear. They seek a place in society that affirms their value as citizens and as Aboriginal persons, and they are finding that embracing a personal vision of who they are and who they will become reconnects them with the wisdom of their Elders.

A student in the DeGagné study expressed the elation and hope that he experienced in finding direction in his life.

> [F]or the first time in my entire life there is a purpose to my education. The purpose is spiritual. The purpose is intellectual.... I can see an answer and it's real because we're it. I am the answer. You, my friend are the answer.... What we're doing right here is the solution to what people put in quotation marks as "the Indian problem."[9]

That student was discovering the wisdom of tradition articulated by a Mohawk elder speaking to the Royal Commission:

> In our language we call ourselves Ongwehonwe. Some people say it means real people.... It says that we are the ones that are living on the earth today, right at this time. We are the ones that are carrying the responsibility of our nations, of our spirituality, or our relationship to the Creator, on our shoulders. We have the mandate to carry that today, at this moment in time.[10]

The purpose of policy and policy research is surely to foster the conditions that will allow Aboriginal youth to find purpose and assume responsibility that are at the core of identity and empowerment. The policy challenge for the next decade is to dismantle the barriers that continue to block realization of those possibilities.

Notes

1 See the article by Guimond and Cooke in this issue of *Horizons*.

2 See the article by Guimond and Robitaille in this issue of *Horizons*.

3 See the article by Chandler and Lalonde in this issue of *Horizons*. See also Chandler and Ball (1990).

4 Personal communication. The late Dr. Brant was the author's brother.

5 Sherry Lawson as quoted in RCAP (1996: 164).

6 D'Arcy as quoted in DeGagné (2002: 84).

7 See RCAP, Volume 3, note 142, p. 332, citing the *Agenda for First Nations and Inuit Mental Health* (Health and Welfare Canada, 1991). *A Comprehensive Culturally Appropriate Mental Wellness Framework* prepared by the First Nations and Inuit Mental Wellness Advisory Committee (MWAC) (2001) was cited in the Final Report of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, *A Healing Journey, Volume 1*, Appendix Q, pp.405-407. A draft plan of MWAC (2006) was referenced in *Out of the Shadows At Last*, (Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, 2006) Section 13.1.2.

8 For examples, see Erasmus (2002).

9 Alexandre in DeGagné (2002: 95-96).

10 Testimony of Charlie Patton, Mohawk Trail Longhouse at RCAP public hearings May 6, 1993, in RCAP (1997).

Full references are available in the online version of this issue. It can be accessed by visiting the PRI web site at <www.policyresearch.gc.ca>

Aboriginal Peoples
A Young Population for Years to Come

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The Aboriginal population has experienced considerable growth over the past several decades and, compared to the Canadian population, has a very youthful age structure. With high fertility rates and moderate improvements in life expectancy, these trends are expected to continue well into the future.

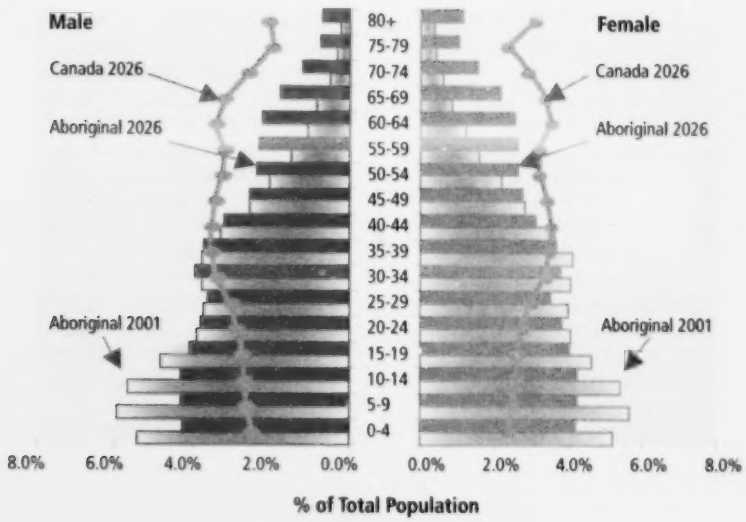
The majority of Aboriginal children and youth live in two-parent families, but a high proportion also live in lone-parent families headed by females. Compounded with the geographic and cultural diversities among Aboriginal populations, the Aboriginal population demographic presents several opportunities and challenges for health, education and socio-economic programs – especially those directed to Aboriginal youth.

Beyond implications on Aboriginal-specific programs, Aboriginal youth also have the potential to make significant contributions to the country's labour force, as the non-aboriginal labour force diminishes due to the rapidly aging Canadian population. This will be particularly relevant in regions and urban areas with a large Aboriginal youth population.

Growing Rapidly and Young

According to the 2001 Census, about 976,300 individuals self-identified as Aboriginal. After adjustments for non-enumeration and survey undercoverage, it is further estimated that the

FIGURE 1
Age-Gender Pyramid for Aboriginal and Canadian Populations, Medium Growth Scenario, 2001 and 2026



Sources: (1) Aboriginal Population Household and Family Projections, 2001-2026, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Canada Housing and Mortgage Corporation, 2007.
(2) Population Projections for Canada, Provinces and Territories 2005-2031, Statistics Canada, Catalogue 91-520-XIE.

Aboriginal Population Household and Family Projections, 2001-2026

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), in partnership with the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), recently developed a series of Aboriginal population, household and family projections that span twenty-five years, from 2001-2026. The model is based on the cohort-component method and was developed to provide concurrent projections for four distinct Aboriginal populations: Métis, Inuit, Non-Status Indian and Registered Indian.

The projections are based on data from individuals who self-identified as an Aboriginal person and/or who identified as being registered under the *Indian Act* in the 2001 Census of Population. The 2001 Census estimated the Aboriginal population to be about 976,300. However, due to survey errors such as non-enumeration and survey under-coverage, this figure under-represents the actual population. To account for these survey errors, adjustments were made to the 2001 Census baseline data for the Aboriginal population. Further refinements were also required in order to assign individuals to the following four discrete Aboriginal populations:

- Registered Indians (regardless of Aboriginal identity)
- Non-Status Indian
- Métis
- Inuit

This process enabled the transfer of individuals who reported Métis, Inuit or North American Indian identity (as well as registration under the *Indian Act*) into the baseline count for the Registered Indian population. The resulting baseline counts for the individual Aboriginal population group are: 633,600 Registered Indians; 274,200 Métis; 110,300 Non-Status Indians; and 46,200 Inuit, **for a total adjusted Aboriginal population of 1,064,300 in 2001.**

The results reported in this article use the baseline data and projection results from the above-named projection series. It should be noted that as a consequence of these adjustments, the population base numbers used in this article differ from those published elsewhere.

To be consistent with recent trends for the Aboriginal population, the projections used in this article are based on assumptions developed under the "Medium Growth Scenario" that assumes:

- Moderate decline in fertility.
- Moderate decline in the volume of migration at a pace observed for the decade of the 1990s. (Results of analyses conducted from 1996 to 2001 noted a generally consistent trend of modest net in-flows to reserves; large net out-flows from rural areas; and small net out-flows from urban areas.)
- Gradual improvement in average life expectancy at birth, except for the Inuit (whose life expectancy is assumed to remain constant).
- Currently stable parenting patterns and distribution of transfer of Aboriginal identity to children. These projections include specific assumptions relating to fertility, parenting patterns and how these affect the identity of children. Children who come from families with one Aboriginal parent and one non-Aboriginal parent (exogamous parenting), or children who come from families with one parent from one Aboriginal group and the other parent from a different Aboriginal group (endogamous parenting), cannot be assumed to always have the same identity as one, both or for that matter, either of the parents.
- Declining rate of reinstatement of status under provisions in the *Indian Act* as amended in 1985 for Registered Indians.

Aboriginal population was 1,064,300 in 2001. Over the next two decades, the Aboriginal population is expected to grow significantly, reaching about 1,566,900 individuals in 2026, an increase of 47% from 2001. The Aboriginal population is growing (at 1.8 %) almost twice as fast as the Canadian population (1.0 %).

Assuming moderate declines in fertility, growth is expected to slow between 2001 and 2026, from 1.8% to 1.2%, but still remaining well above the projected growth for the Canadian population. Average annual growth rates for specific Aboriginal populations vary by group (See Table 4).

Common to a rapidly growing population is a youthful age structure. Figure 1 shows that, in 2001, about 51% of the Aboriginal population was under 25 years of age. The median age was 24.5 years, compared to 37.2 for Canadians. In contrast to the Canadian population, the Aboriginal population will continue to be youthful in the future, despite significant increases of the population at older ages. **By 2026, the median age of the Aboriginal population is projected to be 31.0 years, compared to 43.3 years for the Canadian population.**

Younger in the Prairies, the North and On Reserves

The Prairies and the North also have very high proportions of Aboriginal children and youth. Projections indicate that this growth will continue and that they will also have the youngest Aboriginal population in Canada for several years to come (Table 1). The youthfulness of the Aboriginal population in these regions can be explained in part by higher fertility levels.

While the population residing off-reserve (where two of three Aboriginal people live) is quite youthful at 25.5 years, **the Aboriginal population living on-reserve is younger still at 22.3 years.** Over the next two decades, Aboriginal population

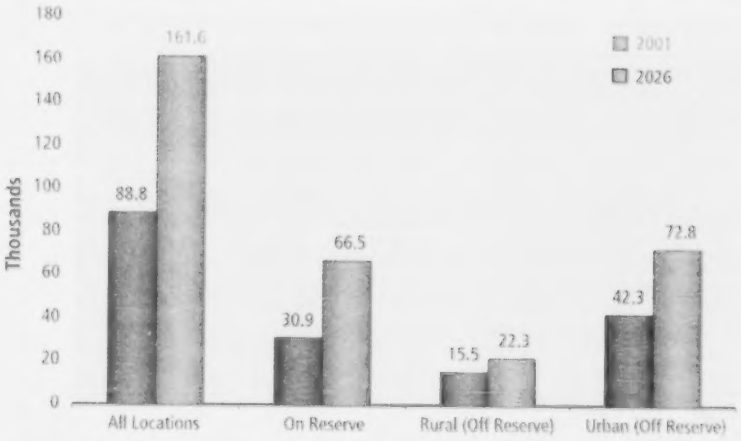
TABLE 1
Median Age for Aboriginals, Canada and Regions, 2001 and 2026

Region	Aboriginal Population*		Regional Population** (Total)	
	2001	2026	2001	2026
British Columbia	26.8	33.7	37.9	44.0
Alberta	**23.2**	**30.7**	**34.7**	**41.2**
Saskatchewan	**20.4**	**27.8**	**36.4**	**42.8**
Manitoba	**22.9**	**28.9**	**36.4**	**40.8**
Ontario	27.6	33.9	36.7	42.4
Quebec	26.3	31.7	38.5	45.0
Atlantic Region	25.4	31.9	38.3	47.3
North	**22.7**	**28.3**	**29.4**	**32.7**
Canada	24.5	31.0	37.2	43.3

*Aboriginal Population Household and Family Projections, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Medium Growth Scenario, 2007.

**Statistics Canada, Catalogue, 91-213-SCB and Catalogue no. 91-520-XIE.

FIGURE 2
Projected Aboriginal Lone Parent Families, 2001 and 2026, Medium Growth Scenario, by Location of Residence*



*Aboriginal Population, Household and Family Projections, 2001-2026, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2007.

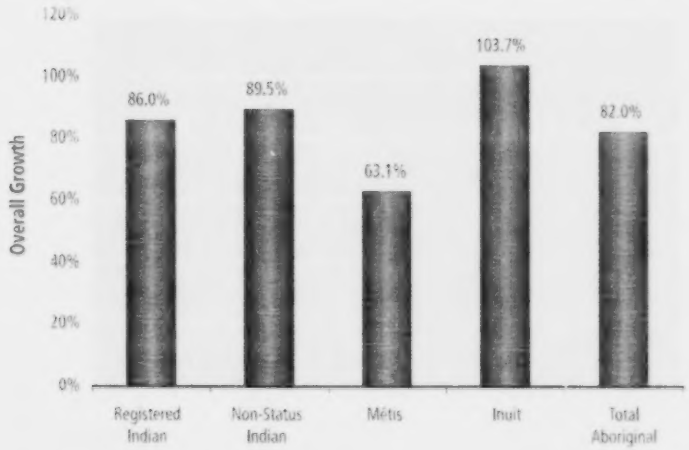
TABLE 2
Median Age and Population less than 25 years of Age for Aboriginal Groups* and Canada, 2001 and 2026**

Year	Population	Median Age (in Years)	% Pop 0-14 yrs	% Pop 15-24 yrs
	Inuit	**20.1**	**40%**	**19%**
	Métis	26.8	29%	18%
2001	Registered Indian	24.0	35%	17%
	Non-Status Indian	23.8	35%	17%
	Canadian Population	37.2	19%	14%
	Inuit	**25.3**	**32%**	**18%**
	Métis	34.1	23%	14%
2026	Registered Indian	32.1	24%	15%
	Non-Status Indian	22.2	35%	20%
	Canadian Population	43.3	15%	11%

*Aboriginal Population Household and Family Projections, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Medium Growth Scenario, 2007.

**Statistics Canada, 91-213-SCB.

FIGURE 3
Overall Projected Growth of Aboriginal Lone Parent Families, 2001 and 2026, Medium Growth Scenario*



*Aboriginal Population, Household and Family Projections, 2001-2026, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2007.

growth is expected to occur rapidly on-reserve and in urban areas. Specifically, **the on-reserve Aboriginal population is expected to increase by 69%, reaching 596,000 in 2026; the urban Aboriginal population is expected to increase by 42% to 724,100; and the rural population is projected to increase moderately by 22% to 246,800 by 2026.**

More Households and Families in The Future

As the current population ages, larger numbers of young Aboriginal adults will reach the ages of household and family formation, resulting in a rapid growth in the number of Aboriginal households and families. Projections suggest that Aboriginal households could increase by 71% to 692,100 by 2026, while the number of Aboriginal families could increase significantly by 82%, reaching 615,100 families in 2026.

One important dimension of Aboriginal family demographics is the high proportion of single-parent families. One in four (26%) Aboriginal families is a single-parent family, compared to one in six for Canadian families (16%).[1] The vast majority (87%) of Aboriginal single-parent families are headed by a woman.

The number of Aboriginal single-parent families is projected to rise to 161,600 by 2026 **(an 82% increase).**

While the highest proportion of single-parent families is located in urban areas, growth in single-parent families is expected to be most pronounced on-reserve (Figure 2).

The Inuit – The Most Youthful Among Aboriginal Groups

- The Inuit population in Canada is the youngest of all Canadian Aboriginal populations and is growing rapidly. After adjustments for non-enumeration and survey-under-coverage, the Inuit population was about 46,200 in 2001, and by 2026 is expected to grow by 62%.
- In 2001, the Inuit population was 17 years younger than the Canadian population (Table 2).
- Compared to other Aboriginal populations, the Inuit have the youngest age structure, with the majority of Inuit children younger than 15 years.
- Nunavut had the highest concentration of Inuit population in the country. In 2001, 51% of the Inuit population lived in Nunavut, followed by Quebec at 21%, the Atlantic Region at 11%, and the Northwest Territories at 9%.[2]
- The majority of Inuit (74%) lived in rural areas while the remainder (26%) lived in urban areas.[3] The regional distribution of the Inuit population is not expected to change significantly by the end of the first quarter of the 21st century. However, population projections do indicate that the proportion of Inuit living in Nunavut could increase to 54% by 2026.

A key component of Inuit population growth is high fertility. **In 2001, the Inuit fertility rate was estimated at 3.4 children per woman.** This figure compares with 1.5 children per woman for the Canadian population; 1.9 for non-status Indians; 2.1 for the Métis; and 2.8 for Registered Indians. While Inuit fertility is expected to decline in the future, it will likely remain well above the fertility level observed for the general population.

Improvements in life expectancy are usually another important component of Aboriginal population growth. However, for the Inuit population, a recent study reveals **no significant improvements in Inuit life expectancy over the 1991-2001 period** (Wilkins et al., 2008). Assuming this trend will continue, improvements in life expectancy are not expected to contribute significantly to Inuit population growth.[4]

The youthful age and continuing high fertility of the Inuit population will contribute to significant increases in the number of households and families.

- In 2001, the number of Inuit households is expected to increase by 93%, reaching 21,600 units by 2026.
- **By 2026, the number of Inuit families is expected to more than double**, from 11,500 to 24,100 families.
- Growth in single-parent families is expected to be significant among all Aboriginal groups, but to occur most rapidly among the Inuit population (See Figure 3). Between 2001 and 2026, the number of Inuit single-parent families is projected to more than double.

TABLE 3
Estimated Regional Distribution of Métis Children and Youth (Ages 0-24 years), Medium Growth Scenario, 2001 and 2026

Region	% Distribution 2001	% Distribution 2026
Canada	100%	100%
British Columbia	14%	12%
Alberta	24%	26%
Saskatchewan	17%	18%
Manitoba	20%	23%
Ontario	15%	12%
Quebec	4%	3%
Atlantic Region	4%	4%
North	1%	2%

Source: Aboriginal Population Household and Family Projections, 2001-2026, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2007.

The Métis – Oldest Among Aboriginal Groups

The Métis population is the second-largest Aboriginal population in Canada, but has the oldest age structure.

- The adjusted Métis population count was 274,200 in 2001. Projections indicate that the Métis population could increase by 37% between 2001 and 2026, reaching 376,500 individuals.

Loss of Entitlement to Registration Status

In 1985, the *Indian Act* was amended to introduce provisions by which individuals could receive Indian Registration (widely known as Bill C-31). Bill C-31 allowed for the reinstatement of status to individuals who lost their status under certain conditions of the old *Indian Act*. Bill C-31 also included new inheritance rules applicable to children born to a Registered Indian on or after April 17, 1985. Under subsection 6(1) of the *Indian Act*, individuals are entitled to be registered if both parents are (or are entitled to be) registered. Under subsection 6(2), individuals are entitled to be registered if only one parent is registered (or entitled to be registered). After two successive generations of out-parenting (parenting of a Registered Individual with a Non-Registered individual), descendants are no longer entitled to registration.

Accordingly, due to the interplay of these inheritance rules and rates of out-parenting, there is a growing segment of descendants who will no longer be entitled to Indian Registration, resulting in significant long-term implications for the Registered Indian population. Long-term projection trends based on 1999 analysis suggest that "...sometime around the end of the fifth generation, no further children would be born with entitlement to Indian Registration" (Stewart Clatworthy 2001: *Re-assessing the Population Impacts of Bill C-31, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2004*).

- The Métis population, with a median age of 26.8 years, was ten years younger than the Canadian population in 2001.
- Two thirds of the Métis population currently live in urban areas. **The urban Métis population is expected to increase by 40% over the next twenty-five years,** to 259,900 in 2026.

Fertility and improvements in life expectancy are important components of Métis population growth. However, a significant portion of past population growth has also been attributed to changes in self-reporting of ethnic identity, over time and across generations – a phenomenon known as *ethnic mobility*.[5]

For the Métis population, **about 60% of the observed growth between 1986 and 2001 was due to changes in self-identification** (Guimond, 2007). However, further analysis and research are required before estimates on the scale and dynamics of ethnic mobility can be incorporated into the population projection model. As a consequence, until ethnic mobility and its impacts on population growth are better understood, mobility and its impacts will continue to be another dimension of uncertainty with respect to the future size of this Aboriginal population (Kerr et al., 2003).

As shown in Table 3, in 2001 the largest concentration of Métis children and youth resided in the Prairies, with Alberta and Manitoba having the highest individual proportions. The majority of the Métis population will in all likelihood remain concentrated in the Prairies.

The youthful age structure and fertility of the Métis population will generate significant increases in household and family formation, especially in urban areas.

- In 2001, it is estimated that there were 119,800 Métis households, 68% of which were located in urban areas.
- The number of Métis households is expected to increase by 60% between 2001 and 2026.
- The number of Métis families is expected to reach 164,200 in 2026, an increase of 69% from 2001.

Registered Indians – Largest Among Aboriginal Groups

The Registered Indian population in Canada is the largest Aboriginal population.[6]

- After adjustments, the Registered Indian population count is expected to grow from about 633,600 to 920,100 by 2026 – an increase of 45%.
- In 2001, just over half (53%) of the Registered Indian population lived on-reserve, while 37% lived in urban areas, and the remaining 10% lived in rural areas.
- The on-reserve and urban populations are expected to increase by 64% and 33% respectively between 2001 and 2026. In contrast, the rural off-reserve population is expected to decrease by 10%.[7]
- In 2001, the Registered Indian population was young, with 52%

of its population less than 25 years of age. While there will be some aging of the population, the Registered Indian population will remain quite youthful, with **39% of the population aged less than 25 years by 2026.**

Registered-Indian population growth is expected to **slow down** over the course of the next two decades. While this can be partially explained by declining fertility, it is also expected that there will be a loss of registration entitlement among a growing number of descendants of Registered Indians. (See Textbox: *Loss of Entitlement to Registration Status.*)

The youthful age structure and fertility of the Registered Indian population will continue to generate significant increases in the number of households and families, especially on-reserve.

- The number of Registered Indian households is expected to increase by 77%, to about 403,600 units in 2026.
- On reserve, the number of Registered Indian Households is projected to double between 2001 and 2026, reaching 191,600 units. In urban areas, the projected increase is 70%.
- The number of Registered Indian families is expected to increase 87%, to 361,300 in 2026.

Non-Status Indians – The Fastest-Growing Population Among Aboriginal Groups

The Non-Status Indian population is the fastest-growing Aboriginal population and could become the youngest by the end of the first quarter of 2026.

TABLE 4
Projected Average Annual Growth Rates for Aboriginal Population Groups* and Canada, Medium Growth Scenario, 2001-2026**

Year	Non-Status Indian	Registered Indian	Métis	Inuit	Canadian Population*
2001-2006	2.2%	1.9%	1.4%	2.1%	1.0%
2006-2011	2.5%	1.7%	1.4%	2.1%	0.8%
2011-2016	2.5%	1.5%	1.3%	2.0%	0.8%
2016-2021	2.3%	1.3%	1.2%	1.8%	0.7%
2021-2026	2.1%	1.1%	1.0%	1.6%	0.7%

* Aboriginal Population Household and Family Projections, 2001-2026, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2007.

** Statistics Canada, Catalogue no. 91-520-XIE.

- After adjustments for non-enumeration and survey-under-coverage, it is estimated that the Non-Status Indian population was 110,300 in 2001.
- Across Aboriginal groups, growth during the 2001-2026 period is expected to occur most rapidly among Non-Status Indians, reaching about 195,600 individuals, an overall increase of 77% from 2001.
- The Non-Status Indian population is currently growing at 2.2% annually. In contrast to other Aboriginal groups, average annual growth rates for the Non-Status Indian population are expected to increase up to 2.5% by 2016 (See Table 4).
- In 2001, the Non-Status Indian population was quite young, with **52% under 25 years of age.**
- Unlike other Aboriginal groups, children and youth are projected to form a growing share of the Non-Status Indian population: **by 2026, about 55% of the Non-Status Indian population will be less than 25 years old.** Accordingly, the Non-Status Indian population could have the youngest age structure of all Aboriginal groups by 2026.
- In 2001, almost three quarters of the Non-Status Indian population lived in urban areas. By 2026, this population is expected to increase by 71%, to 137,100.
- While the Non-Status Indian population living on-reserve is relatively small, this population is expected to grow significantly, from 4,600 in 2001 to 18,600 in 2026.

Higher growth rates for the Non-Status Indian population are due in large part to the **expected increase in the number of descendants of Registered Indians who are not eligible for registration.** This process of loss of entitlement to registration status will affect not only the rate at which the Non-Status Indian population grows, but may also result in a future age structure that is very young.

Like other Aboriginal groups, another important component of Non-Status

Indian population growth is fertility. But while fertility and loss of entitlement to registration status can explain a great deal of the growth, as with the Métis population, a good portion of the future population growth could also be impacted by ethnic mobility. As with the Métis population, further analysis and research are required before estimates on the scale and dynamics of ethnic mobility can be incorporated into the population projection model. As a consequence, until ethnic mobility and its impacts on population growth are better understood, it will continue to be another dimension of uncertainty with respect to future population size of this Aboriginal population.

The youthful age structure of the Non-Status Indian population will continue to generate significant increases in the number of households and families.

- In 2026, the number of Non-Status Indian households is expected to have increased by 67%, to 75,400 units.
- The number of Non-Status Indian families is also expected to increase from 35,600 in 2001 to 65,500 in 2026.

Investing in Aboriginal Youth

As demonstrated, the Aboriginal population is growing rapidly and is very young compared to the Canadian population. Demographic projections suggest that these trends will continue well into the future, even though the population will be getting older. Aboriginal population growth is particularly strong in the Prairie and Northern regions. Urban and on-reserve locations are also expected to experience high levels of Aboriginal population growth. In contrast, the Canadian population has a much older age structure and is entering into an era where a large segment of the population will be retiring from the labour force.

The youthfulness of the Aboriginal population will continue to have many implications for various socio-economic initiatives. With a particular focus on investments in education, there are opportunities for improving the overall well-being of Aboriginal people. It is well documented that education attainment promotes labour-force participation, reduces an individual's dependence on government transfers, and impacts social economic status as well as overall well-being.

A rapidly growing population also comes with its challenges. As Aboriginal youth grow older and start forming households and families, additional pressure can also be expected on existing resources, such as the demand for housing, which will be most prevalent on-reserve and in urban locations.

Notes

1 A "census family' refers to a married couple (with or without children of either or both spouses); a couple living common-law (with or without children of either or both partners); or a single-parent of any marital status, with at least one child living in the same dwelling. A couple living common-law may be of the opposite or of the same sex.

2 The vast majority of the Inuit population resides in one of four Inuit land-claim regions: Nunavut; Nunavik Region in Quebec; Inuvialuit Region in the Northwest Territories; and Nunatsiavut Region in Labrador.

3 "Urban" – as defined by Statistics Canada – refers to an area with a minimum population concentration of 1,000 persons and a population density of at least 400 persons per square kilometre. "Rural"– as defined here – includes Inuit individuals living on reserves. (In Canada, only about 4.5% of Inuit live on reserves.)

4 Based on this study, the Medium Growth Scenario for the Inuit population projections assumes that life expectancy will remain constant throughout the projection period (from the Aboriginal Population, Household and Family Projections, 2001-2026, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 2007).

5 In the literature, "ethnic mobility" is referred to as intra-generational ethnic mobility resulting from a change in an individual's affiliation over time (i.e., between censuses).

6 The total adjusted Aboriginal population in 2001 was 1,064,300, where approximately 60% were Registered Indian, 26% Métis, 10% Non-Status Indian, and 4% Inuit.

7 This is mainly due to the assumption that rural areas will continue to lose some of their Registered Indian population through migration from rural areas to reserve and urban areas. Stewart Clatworthy and Mary-Jane Norris. 2007. *Aboriginal Mobility and Migration: Trends, Recent Patterns, and Implication: 1971-2001, Aboriginal Policy Research, Moving Forward, Making a Difference. Volume IV*, Chapter 13. Thompson Educational Publishing, INC.: Toronto.

Full references are available in the online version of this issue. It can be accessed by visiting the PRI web site at <www.policyresearch.gc.ca>

How Can One Be a Young Aboriginal?

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The question asked in the title of this paper is not so much a reference to Montesquieu's famous question (How can one be Persian?) as it is a nod to its reformulation by Quebec author, Jean-Paul Desbiens, following the events of the Oka crisis (Desbiens, 1993). Although "youth" is a favoured social category in research, to the point where young people are a traditional focus in anthropology, sociology and more broadly social sciences (Bucholtz, 2002; Galland, 2001), they continue to be neglected in Aboriginal studies in Quebec. And yet taking the pulse of youth has become essential in any study of the social, political and cultural issues and challenges facing First Nations.

Behind the figures and the demographic vitality which contrasts with non-Aboriginal society, what does it mean to be young and Aboriginal today? In this article,[1] I will attempt to provide the groundwork for reflection toward a better understanding of who these young people are, what sets them apart from their young non-Aboriginal neighbours, how they organize themselves to cast their voice and, finally, how public policies can take their realities and their aspirations into consideration.

Who are Young Aboriginals?

A Recent Political Category

For us, observers, policy-makers and stakeholders, the concept of youth refers first and foremost to a social and administrative category. Maxime Vollant, who was still a coordinator with the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Council (FNQLYC) in 2005, recalled, for example, that for his Council the category "youth" was intended for individuals between 18 and 30 years of age, whereas the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Economic Development Commission classifies "youth" as the 18-35 year old age group. For its part, the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues has set the parameters at 15-24 years old. In Aboriginal settings in Canada, this category was introduced just 30 or so years ago.

Compulsory education in Indian residential schools, which cast aside traditional rites of passage (marking different passages from childhood to adulthood), is just one of the factors that contributed to the generation gap in Aboriginal societies. *Youth, Elders* or the *residential school generation* are recent categories that took on a growing importance from the 1970s, in a context of self-assertion, political and territorial claims, and cultural reappropriation. But what does this category mean at the community level? To understand the scope of such a concept from a grassroots perspective, I took three dimensions of identity-building processes that distinguish Aboriginal youth from their non-Aboriginal neighbours: intergenerational relations, familial relations and relations with mainstream society. I do not have the space to discuss here the challenges relating to education and adapted curricula, as that would be subject enough for a separate article in itself.[2] Nonetheless, they represent another essential dimension that reflects the specificity of the challenges faced by Aboriginal youth.

Intergenerational Relations

One of the first challenges for young Aboriginals is to formulate their role

and construct their experience as a continuation of and in close relationship with previous generations which each have their own responsibilities in the contemporary context. The Elders, men and women who knew the nomadic way of life, have become icons in the processes of supporting and promoting culture and traditions. They are considered the caretakers of local knowledge and are regularly consulted as guides. Despite the extreme loosening of relations between children and their grandparents (where the adoption of a sedentary way of life upset the transmission of knowledge through experience and observation), Elders are at the heart of the identity representations of young people. Young people must position themselves in the eye of Elders, but also in the eye of another generation – the residential school generation – which early on assumed its political responsibilities. As the principal actors of political change in the 1970s, many members of this generation still occupy key positions in the social, cultural, and political arenas today.

Family Ties

The importance of family undoubtedly represents another essential factor in the anchorings of identity among young people. The intellectual Vine Deloria Jr. stressed the importance of family as the first anchoring of identity: [TRANSLATION] "People in America do not, in practice, have a personal identity in the sense that Indians can feel it. When you meet an Indian, most of the time, the question is 'Where are you from?' followed by 'Who is your family?' In American society, you are asked where you are from and what you do." (Deloria, 1997: 218 [TRANSLATION]). To be young, then, is first and foremost to take one's place in a relationship of kinship and ancestry that extends into other spheres of society. For example, responsibility for (and not ownership of) ancestral lands now the subject of land claims is governed by family dynamics of management, occupation, utilization, and transmission. The family dimension prevails in the introduction of oneself, and there is no shortage of terms: for the Atikamekw, for example, one is *nosim* (grandson), *nosimicic* (great-grandson), *octesinan* (older brother), or *nimis* (sister), before being "young." Among the Inuit, one is first and foremost *irngutaq* (grandchild), *irngutaliqqiuti* (great-grandchild) or *ani* (brother).

Relational Model and Genealogical Model

Are there unique Aboriginal characteristics with regard to relations between generations, with family, with grandparents and with ancestors? Not that we, *white* non-Aboriginals, neglect our grandparents and our Elders. But we are a long way from making their disappearance a cultural, social and identity issue. Senior citizens are not at the centre of young Quebeckers' preoccupations in debates about social and cultural continuity, collective *survival*, identity affirmation or political claims. For the anthropologist Tim Ingold, the relationship between generations in many Aboriginal societies (especially traditionally nomadic ones) follows a *relational model* as opposed to a *genealogical model* characteristic of our western societies (Ingold, 2000: 136). Ingold explains that in western societies, the relation to ancestors, Elders, previous generations or, in a nutshell, the past, follows a fixed and linear continuity. Generations follow one another along the line of time. Each new generation replaces and sets itself apart from the previous one by an experience, a context and events that make it unique to the point of creating a "generation gap" (see Manheim 1990 or Attias-Donfut 1988). The western genealogical model, characteristic of modernity, supposes that "the present exists for us only thanks to the inexorable

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[TRANSLATION] "My grandfather told me that when he was 15 he was able to fend for himself, he didn't need anyone to take care of him anymore, he was even able to look after others. At age 15, we are only starting out in life. Then, I think about the generation that came after him, those who were taken away from their families, they experienced a trauma that we're still trying to heal and sometimes even forget. But them at least, they were given a sense of responsibility early on in life. Because some of them, by the time they reached 20-23, that's when I'd say band councils started to emerge as the representative and administrative authorities in communities, that started to develop, they were given this sense of responsibility right away. In part, it's the generation that went before them that gave them this sense of responsibility, since the world was changing very quickly and we were living in communities. […]" (P.M., 28 years old, Atikamekw from Manawan, 2005 CIÉRA colloquium).

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abolition of the past from which it proceeds" (Descola, 1996: 226, in Ingold, 2000: 136); whereas in the genealogical model, life is contained in the concept of generation (each generation leads a life that characterizes it with its own identity referents), in the relational model, the concept of generation is integrated into the process of life. The ties between generations, between past and present, form a continuous cycle, a perpetual rebirth. It confirms the importance given to the dynamics of knowledge transmission and to intergenerational and familial relations among the First Nations. It also confirms awkwardness, largely widespread, where "young people" are spoken of without consideration of their relations with other generations, family, the community, the town or city, the forest, in short, with the complexity of their life settings.

Relationship with Non-Aboriginal Society

In addition to building its own social and personal experience in a constant relationship with two other generations, with family, with the community or with the Nation, First Nations youth must also position themselves in relation to non-Aboriginal society. In Canada, it has become commonplace today to speak of the realities faced by First Nations youth in terms of cultural disruption, identity crisis or confusion in a changing world. Suicide, drugs, alcoholism, social despair, and violence are realities, whether in communities or in an urban setting, which nourish social representations, guide scientific analyses and justify research initiatives. In public discourse, young people would all be passively suffering from the present context of social transition; they would be contemporary victims of a heritage forged by attempts at assimilation and denial of rights and identities. They would be lost between two points of reference, that of their Elders and that of the dominant society, a place of advanced modernity. Regularly targeted by the media, these realities have become inseparable from the "*youth culture*" in contemporary Aboriginal settings. Talking about Aboriginal youth means talking about suicide, poverty, unemployment, school dropout and poor education outcomes. Very early on, then, First Nations youth must learn to shape their identity in the eye of non-Aboriginal society and persistent social representations.

A complex landscape of social representations, judgments and positionings is therefore the backdrop against which is built the identity experience of First Nations youth.

What are Young People Doing? Spaces for Expression and Affirmation

Continuing to speak of the realities of youth in terms of *problems* and *despair*, to vaunt initiatives *against* suicide and to develop *therapy* programs only serves as a reminder of the ills that must be fought, not the initiatives that must be supported. What is needed is for young people to be seen as catalysts of change for their societies. Numerous Aboriginal communities, institutions and structures have taken this change of paradigm into account: they no longer speak of walks against suicide, but walks and initiatives for life, the term wellness is preferred to healing, well-being to despair, healing to therapy. Prevention and promotion of life are giving way to suppressive, moralizing and indoctrination policies. Under the impetus of countless resource persons, and particularly those of the residential school generation, many young people are burying an image that continues to be rooted firmly in local and national social representations: that of destruction as a means of expression. By joining band councils, creating their own institutions (youth councils), becoming involved in national associations (see, for example, Labrador Inuit Youth (*LIY*),[3] Saputiit Youth Association of Nunavik[4] or the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Council, which will be discussed below), Aboriginal youth are claiming increased responsibilities and promoting initiative as a new model of social recognition. Internationally, the representation of youth is getting organized: "Indigenous youth were a vital part of deliberations on all matters in the Forum [...] and the indigenous youth representatives called for the establishment of indigenous units within all United Nations agencies."[5] (Heather Minton-Lightning, the representative for

indigenous youth at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues). Through the development of music, literature and the arts in general, youth are responding to change by a variety of aspirations and influences that are shaped in a complex process of appropriation of signs, symbols and discourse making various spaces for exchange accessible: forest and territory, community and urban setting, pan-Amerindian gatherings, new technologies.... These spaces for expression and affirmation cannot be dissociated from each other since they represent places of contemporary experience for youth, places where they commit themselves with more or less conviction, with more or less success, and with more or less disillusionment.

Conclusion

So then, before being a young Aboriginal, one is first and foremost Abenaki, a native of Wôlinak, a member of a family and the daughter of one's parents. Depending on the audience, one is first and foremost the sister of one's brother before being from Betsiamites; when with a young person from another family from Betsiamites, one is first and foremost from Wemotaci before being Atikamekw; when with a young Atikamekw from Manawan, one is first and foremost an Algonquin before being an Indian; when with a Mohawk, one is first and foremost an Indian, or in more politically correct terms, a member of a First Nation, before being an Aboriginal when with a white person. The term "young Aboriginal" is a useful shortcut for understanding, from a policy perspective, the realities and challenges facing new First Nation generations; it is also useful for developing intervention tools from a social perspective. But one must be cautious of taking such a category out of its context, of wanting to transpose it to a universe that has nothing in common. To do so is to risk confirming the old intuition of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1980) for whom youth is no more than a word. Although the Secrétariat à la jeunesse du Québec does not have a specific policy on First Nations youth, the debates and actions were laid out in the first 2002-2005 youth action plan, common to all youth in the province. In August 2005, the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Council presented to the Government of Quebec a report in which it identified a series of recommendations expressing the specificities of Aboriginal realities and the priorities that needed to be addressed in public policies on young Aboriginals:

1. promote bringing young people and Elders together;
2. improve services intended for First Nations youth;
3. promote educational success and entry into the workforce;
4. improve health; and
5. increase their presence in society, both in the world and in their life settings, through more numerous exchanges with the non-Aboriginal population.[6]

In 2000, the Parti Québécois government supported the organization of the Quebec Youth Summit to which representatives of First Nations youth were invited. The realities and challenges debated at the Summit, which were a world apart from their preoccupations, led the First Nations representatives, in the view of Maxime Vollant,[7] to organize their own circle for consultation, which resulted in the preparation of an initial report entitled *"Le nouveau cercle. Rassemblement des jeunes des Premières nations du Québec et du Labrador,"* (2001).

To be a young First Nations person refers to identity-driven characteristics: a deep and sustainable attachment to the community or Nation to which the young person belongs, defining a collective identity, and inclusive of young people living in an urban setting who have left for the city to pursue a university education or seek employment; the family and intergenerational ties that prevail in the expression of the young person's personal identity; a positioning that must take place, paradoxically, subject to judgments by the non-Aboriginal society, and with it. A complex landscape of social representations, judgments and positionings is therefore the backdrop against which is built the identity experience of First Nations youth, who are, at the end of the day, many other things before being young and Aboriginal and who do many things other than unanimously choose destruction as their only refuge.

Notes

1 This article is inspired by publications, workshops, symposiums and research aimed at better identifying the realities and challenges facing young Aboriginals (See Jérôme 2005a and b).

2 <http://www.avenir-future.com/>

3 <http://www.nunatsiavut.com/en/youth.php>

4 <http://www.saputiit.ca/index.htm>

5 Comments taken from the web site of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, <http://www.unhchr.ch/huricane/huricane.nsf/0/1ED6734E6490E4E7C1256D250027C28B?opendocument>.

6 Available at the following address: <http://www.jeunes.gouv.qc.ca/strategie/consultation/liste-des-memoires.htm> mémoire 72.

7 Maxime Vollant explained the motivation for this gathering at his conference entitled "Les jeunes des Premières nations du Québec et leur culture traditionnelle," presented on March 28, 2003, at the GÉTIC-CIÉRA colloquium at Laval University.

Full references are available in the online version of this issue. It can be accessed by visiting the PRI web site at <www.policyresearch.gc.ca>

Reports and Publications of Interest

Aboriginal Policy Research Vol. 1-5: Proceedings from the 2002 and 2006 Aboriginal Policy Research Conferences.
<http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/ra/abus/ctu_e.html>

Aboriginal Well-being: Canada's Continuing Challenge.
Edited by Jerry P. White, Dan Beavon, and Nicholas Spence. Thompson Educational Publishing, 2007.
<http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/ra/abus/ctu_e.html>

Redefining How Success is measured in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Learning
Report on Aboriginal learning, Canadian Council on Learning, November 2007.
<http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Newsroom/Releases/RedefiningSuccessInAboriginalLearning.htm>

The Potential Contribution of Aboriginal Canadians to Labour Force, Employment, Productivity and Output Growth in Canada, 2001-2017.
Centre for the Study of Living Standards, November 2007.
<http://www.csls.ca/reports/csls2007-04.pdf>

Report of the Investigation into Child and Youth Protection Services in Ungava Bay and Hudson's Bay.
Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, April 2007.
<http://www.cdpdj.qc.ca/en/publications/docs/rapport_Nunavik_anglais.pdf>

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Children and Youth: Time to Act.
National Council of Welfare Reports. Volume 127.
National Council of Welfare, Fall 2007.
<http://www.ncwcnbes.net/en/research/TimeToAct-AgissonsMaintenant.html>

The Educational Success of Aboriginal Students
Committee on Education, Government of Quebec, February 2007.
<http://www.assnat.qc.ca/eng/37legislature2/commissions/CE/rapport-autochtones-en.pdf>

Where are the Children?
Online resource about the residential school system in Canada.
Legacy of Hope Foundation, November 2007.
<http://www.wherearethechildren.ca>

The Current Well-Being of Registered Indian Youth

Concerns for the Future?

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One of the fundamental roles of policy research is to measure past change in order to inform current and future policy approaches. This requires measurement tools that are reasonably reliable, and that can be used to develop a picture of the recent past, while providing a glimpse into the future. To that end, the Research and Analysis Directorate of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has developed a series of population and community-level indicators based on the United Nations' Human Development Index (Cooke et al., 2004). The goal was to produce a set of reliable measures of broad aspects of physical and material well-being of Aboriginal peoples, which can be used to track progress over time and inform policy and program development by federal, provincial, and Aboriginal governments and institutions.

Trends identified to date by the Registered Indian Human Development Index (HDI) and the First Nations Community Well-Being Index (CWB) are encouraging, but at the same time invite further questions. Indeed, the overall well-being of First Nations improved considerably between 1981 and 2001, and the gaps relative to other Canadians on life expectancy and basic functional literacy closed significantly. However, these results also show that substantial well-being gaps continue to exist and, unless profound changes occur, it will be decades, if not generations, before equity between First Nations and other Canadians is reached (O'Sullivan, 2006). As well, within the First Nations population, better health and education (Hull, 2005) outcomes for women have resulted in unusually wide gender gaps (Cooke et al., 2006).

One of the important questions suggested by this research is how conditions for young people have changed in recent decades. Positive social and economic transitions by youth and young adults, including completion of school and beginning of employment careers, and the establishment of relationships and households, are critical for lifetime stocks of human, social, and economic capital. At the same time, these are ages of higher health and social risk. Experiences in late adolescence have been shown to contribute significantly to the overall difference between Native Americans and others in mental and physical health and social outcomes (Harris et al., 2006). Furthermore, the experiences and characteristics of young people provide a window into the future. Examination of the conditions of youth cohorts, and how the experiences of young people have changed, gives us insight into whether the improvements seen in recent decades for the whole population are likely to continue.

In order to understand the changing conditions of young people, we have extended the Registered Indian HDI methodology to create an age-specific index of well-being, and used it to compare cohorts of Registered Indians and other Canadians aged 15-29 in the 1981-2001 census years. This age-specific HDI will again capture the following three important dimensions

of well-being: 1) a long and healthy life, 2) knowledge, and 3) a decent standard of living.[1]

Registered Indian Youth HDI

The overall improvement in the well-being of the total Registered Indian population is reflected in similar improvement among Registered Indian youth. Table 1 shows the overall Youth HDI scores, which are an average of the composite mortality, educational attainment and income index scores. Scores for all three age groups rose between 1981 and 2001, closing the gap between Registered Indian and other Canadian youth.

The HDI is useful as a measure of the overall well-being. However, these overall scores can obscure important patterns in the individual dimensions of well-being, i.e., health, knowledge and standard of living. In the case of Registered Indian youth, examining these dimensions reveals a less optimistic picture of the improvement in the conditions of Registered Indian youth, relative to other Canadians.

Health

Life expectancy at birth among Registered Indians has improved considerably since 1981, closing the gap with other Canadians. This health indicator takes into account the age-pattern of mortality for a specific reference period, and use it to "predict" the expected life for someone born during that period. However, this health indicator has little use for monitoring changes in the health conditions of youth since it obscures the age pattern of mortality.

TABLE 1
Human Development Index (HDI), Registered Indians and Other Canadian Youth (15-29), 1981 and 2001[2]

	1981	2001
Age 15-19		
Registered Indians	.611	.713
Other Canadians	.838	.905
HDI Gap	.227	.192
Age 20-24		
Registered Indians	.612	.712
Other Canadians	.827	.901
HDI Gap	.215	.189
Age 25-29		
Registered Indians	.623	.737
Other Canadians	.846	.919
HDI Gap	.223	.182

TABLE 2
Mortality Rate from Age 15 to Age 30 (per thousand), Registered Indians[3] and Other Canadian Youth,[4] 1981 and 2001

	1981	2001
Male		
Registered Indians	75.7	38.5
Other Canadians	19.8	10.6
Gap	55.9	27.9
Female		
Registered Indians	34.2	20.6
Other Canadians	6.7	4.4
Gap	27.5	16.2

Table 2 shows the changing mortality rates for Registered Indians and other Canadians aged 15 to 30. Mortality among Registered Indian male and female youth has decreased substantially over the 1981-2001 period. Despite these gains, the gap between Registered Indian and other Canadian youth remains wide. Current mortality rates for Registered Indian youth are comparable to the rates observed in Canada during the early 1940s (Dominion Bureau of Statistics, 1947).

TABLE 3
Educational Attainment, Registered Indians and Other Canadian Youth (15-29), 1981 and 2001[5]

	1981	2001
Grade 9 or higher		
Age 15-29		
Registered Indians	75.3	90.3
Other Canadians	94.7	97.7
Gap	19.4	7.4
High School Certificate or higher		
Age 20-24		
Registered Indians	34.5	50.5
Other Canadians	69.5	84.4
Gap	35.0	33.9
High School Certificate or higher		
Age 25-29		
Registered Indians	42.8	60.6
Other Canadians	72.5	85.9
Gap	29.7	25.3

Knowledge

The continuing overall gap in formal education between Registered Indians and other Canadians is due in large part to the very low educational attainment of those now in adult and older adult ages (i.e., population aged 30 and over). As formal education is mainly acquired during the teenage and early adult years (i.e., before age 30), examining the educational attainment of young people gives us a better idea of current education trends.

Progress in functional literacy, as measured by the proportion with a grade 9 education (Table 3), has been remarkable for Registered Indian youth between 1981 and 2001. Despite this substantial progress in basic reading and writing skills, the "high school education gap" relative to other Canadian youth shows little improvement. In addition, the widening difference between Registered Indians aged 20-24 and those 25-29 highlights the increasing importance of later educational attainment among Registered Indians.

Compared to various ethnic groups in Canada, Registered Indian youth rank amongst the lowest in terms of educational attainment in 2001 (Table 4). Although the increase in the absolute level of education is a positive outcome, the continued low achievement of Registered Indians relative to other Canadians is a concern. In the context of a highly competitive labour market, the lower and later educational attainment of Registered Indian youth suggests that, as these cohorts age, they will continue to lag behind other Canadians in employment and income, and be at greater risk of low income and dependency.

Standard of Living

Whereas the Registered Indian HDI uses the average per capita income as a measure of material standard of living, for those in young age groups, we use average total household income as a measure of the economic resources available to youth.

As shown in Table 5, the average household income where Registered Indian youth reside increased between 1980 and 2000, providing evidence that the material standard of living for young people improved. However, these increases did not keep pace with those seen in other Canadian households. As a result, the gap between Registered Indian and other Canadian youth in the material conditions of living widened. These differences are further compounded by the fact that First Nations households are larger than other Canadian households, on average. Similar trends are observed for both youth living in reserve communities, and those living off-reserve, each accounting for about half of the young Registered Indian population.

Gender Differences

One of the findings of the Registered Indian HDI research has been that gender differences have been widening, particularly on the knowledge dimension of well-being. Registered Indian women have had increasingly higher educational attainment than Registered Indian men, although they have not caught up with men in

TABLE 4
Proportion of Young Adults (20-29) with High School or Higher Education, Selected Ethnic and Aboriginal Groups, 2001[6]

Jewish	95.0%
Chinese	92.2%
Filipino	92.1%
Balkan	92.0%
Greek	91.5%
Lebanese	89.9%
Italian	89.8%
Polish	88.6%
Dutch	88.0%
Spanish	87.8%
Hungarian	86.4%
Ukrainian	86.3%
African	85.7%
Caribbean	85.3%
South Asian	84.8%
German	84.4%
Latin, Central and South American	83.2%
Portuguese	80.6%
Vietnamese	79.3%
Métis	70.4%
Non-status Indian	63.5%
Registered Indian	57.1%
Inuit	54.2%

terms of average individual income (Cooke et al., 2004).

Young Registered Indian women have higher HDI scores than men in all three age groups (Table 6), but this gender gap has been declining for the youngest age groups. These changes in the youth HDI gender gap are due to two different trends. On the one hand, young men's mortality declined faster than young women's between 1981 and 2001 (Table 2).

TABLE 5
Average Household Income,[7] Registered Indian and Other Canadian Youth (15-29), Constant 2000 Dollars, 1980 and 2000

	1980	2000
Age 15-29		
Registered Indian	$41,012	$43,391
Other Canadian	$68,247	$78,008
Gap	$27,235	$34,617
Age 20-24		
Registered Indian	$38,347	$41,042
Other Canadian	$62,460	$71,185
Gap	$24,113	$30,143
Age 25-29		
Registered Indian	$39,010	$39,679
Other Canadian	$57,281	$64,882
Gap	$18,271	$25,203

TABLE 6
Human Development Index (HDI) for Registered Indian Youth (15-29) by Gender and Age Group, 1981 and 2001

	1981	2001
Age 15-19		
Male	.599	.706
Female	.675	.740
Gap	.076	.034
Age 20-24		
Male	.574	.694
Female	.654	.750
Gap	.080	.056
Age 25-29		
Male	.604	.701
Female	.652	.777
Gap	.048	.076

On the other hand, Registered Indian women's advantage in educational attainment grew, especially among those aged 25-29. By 2001, 64 percent of women had high school or some post-secondary education, compared with 57 percent of men in this age group.

One aspect of Table 6 which provides a glimpse of future well-being for these youth cohorts is how well-being progresses with age. Intuitively, one would expect well-being to increase with age. This is the case for young Registered Indian women, but not for the men. In 2001, the HDI for young women moves from 0.740 at age 15-19 to 0.777 at age 25-29, while scores for young men remain fairly constant across age groups. For young women, the risk of mortality declines substantially from the teens to the 20s, and the proportion with higher education rises. The lack of such age-related improvements for men suggests that young Registered Indian men are increasingly being "left behind." At the same time however, previous research indicates that the rising educational attainment of Registered Indian women has not appreciably narrowed the income gap with men.

Conclusions

A focus on tracking the conditions of young people is important not only from the perspective of improving their situations today, but also because young people reflect future possibilities for populations and communities. Trends in health, education and income of young people indicate that, despite some absolute improvements, Registered Indians still lag far behind other young Canadians. In other words, the Registered Indian youth of today are doing much better than their parents at the same age, but they remain near the bottom of the well-being scale relative to other Canadian youth.

The collective failure of federal, provincial, and Aboriginal-led programs and policies to reduce the gap in well-being between Registered Indians and other Canadian youth specifically, has implications for the future. The conditions experienced at young ages affect later life in terms of physical health, economic and social resources, and human capital. Current cohorts of young Registered Indians are entering adulthood with fewer of these resources than other Canadians. This suggests that the closing of the well-being gap that has been seen for the whole population between 1981 and 2001 could stop, and even reverse as these young Registered Indians age, enter the workforce, and start their own families. These observations support the findings of previous research that improvements seen in the past may not continue into the future (O'Sullivan, 2006).

Notes

1 References and a complete description of the methodology are available in an extended paper at: <www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/ra/pub4_e.html>.

2 The Registered Indian youth HDI has three composite indices, income, education, and life expectancy. The HDI for those 15-19 uses a slightly different educational attainment indicator than for those 20 and older.

3 Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, unpublished. Registered Indian mortality estimates are taken from estimates produced by Statistics Canada for the purpose of Registered Indian population projections.

4 Statistics Canada. Life Tables, Canada, Provinces and Territories. Ottawa, Health Statistics Division, catalogue 84-537-XIE.

5 Statistics Canada, 1981 to 2001 Census of Canada, custom tabulations.

6 Statistics Canada, 2001 Census of Canada, public use microdata file (pumf). Ethnic groups are defined on the basis of ethnic ancestry, single or multiple responses.

7 Custom tabulations of 1981 and 2001 census data. Average household income calculated for individuals, and not adjusted for household size. Average income is the sum of the household income of all individuals in an age group, divided over the number of individuals in that age group.

Full references are available in the online version of this issue. It can be accessed by visiting the PRI web site at <www.policyresearch.gc.ca>

Aboriginal Students and K–12 School Change in British Columbia

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The low high school completion rates of Aboriginal students are a source of concern for Aboriginal parents and communities as well as educators and provincial and territorial ministries of education. In British Columbia public schools,[1] completion rates for Aboriginal students are far from equivalent to those of their non-Aboriginal peers. The most recent (2005-2006) province-wide completion rate for Aboriginal students was 47 percent in contrast to 82 percent for non-Aboriginal students.[2] There is wide variation in the school-completion rates across communities in British Columbia and often highly variable results within high schools from year to year. This article is about contextual factors associated with this variability. Understanding such factors will assist educators in working toward consistently high, province-wide school completion rates for Aboriginal students.

Investigating Aboriginal Student Mobility

Our research, part of a broad, large-scale exploratory analysis, was conducted with an unusually extensive set of school census data for students over 13 years of age in all public schools in British Columbia (Aman, 2006). These student-level administrative data, masked for anonymity, were collected and generously provided by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. The data gave information on the grade level of students as well as the school locations of students during each school year. At some point in their school career, eight percent of the students identified themselves as "Aboriginal"[3] on the student census form collected each year by the British Columbia Ministry of Education. For this analysis, which focused on students in the secondary grade levels (grades 8 to 12), administrative records were examined for nearly 30,000 Aboriginal students over the school years 1991-1992 to 1998-1999.

Both regression and multi-level modeling were employed to examine the school- and community-level context factors that may be related to differences in Aboriginal school completion. Data collected by the Statistics Canada 2001 Census were used to provide variables related to the socio-economic context for each of the 296 high schools.[4] The Social Deprivation Index (SDI) number assigned jointly by the BC Ministry of Health and the BC Ministry of Education to communities to distribute additional funding to schools was also a variable of interest.[5]

Cohort differences, such as the number of students enrolled at the school and the demographic composition of students associated with each high school, were determined. Initially, cohort differences across schools were considered in terms of the school in which students were enrolled in their first (Grade 8) year of high school. However, analysis also was conducted on the school cohort composition and school outcomes associated with the school the students attended in their fifth (Grade 12) year of high school. This was in recognition that student demographics in schools may change over the years that a cohort progresses through high school grades. The number and proportion of Aboriginal students at each school and the number and proportion of students who had joined the cohort were explored.

TABLE 1
Number of School Changes and Completion Rates in the 1998 Aboriginal Cohort

Number of School Changes (High School Only)	Percentage of 1998 Aboriginal Cohort	Six-Year Completion Rate (Graduation June 2004) %
No school changes	31.8	56.4
1 school change	36.6	48.9
2 school changes	19.8	28.1
3 school changes	9.7	17.3
4 school changes	2.6	11.3

Source: Aman (2006).

Differences in the school completion of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student populations at each school were also considered.

Regression analysis and modeling demonstrate that school and community contexts are related to school outcomes, to some degree. For example, Aboriginal school completion diminishes where there are higher proportions of low-income families in school neighbourhoods.[6] Changing schools also emerged as an important factor: When students change schools, their likelihood of school completion dramatically declines.[7]

Aboriginal High School Mobility and Completion

Many Aboriginal high school students change schools – some quite frequently – throughout their high school years.[8] Table 1 provides information regarding the most recent cohort of students (n = 4,460) available in the administrative data. The students in this cohort first enrolled in Grade 8 in the 1998-1999 school year; it was anticipated that they would complete high school by June 2004 (i.e., within six years[9]).

The highest secondary school completion rate (56.4%) was obtained by the 31.3 percent of Aboriginal students who never changed high schools. This is substantially higher than the overall completion rate (46%) reported for Aboriginal students in this cohort year.[10] The completion rate of Aboriginal students, who changed schools once during high school, was slightly lower (48.9%) and completion rates declined with each additional school change. For the nearly 20 percent of the Aboriginal students who moved twice during their secondary school years, the completion rate was 28.1 percent. Aboriginal students who changed schools three times had a completion rate of 17.3 percent. The Aboriginal students who changed school four times in the secondary grades had the lowest completion rate (11.3%).

Table 2 details mobility-related completion rates in terms of the locations of the students' initial and destination schools.

For 18 percent of the 1998 Aboriginal cohort, progression in school meant they had to change schools at some point. For example, all students attending a middle school or a junior high school will necessarily change to a secondary school offering senior grades. For these students, completion rates were not substantially different than for students who never changed schools. An estimated 20 percent of the 1998 Aboriginal cohort had changed schools within the same school district. The completion rate of these students was substantially lower than their peers who had not changed schools or who had changed schools due to grade progression. These students had a 28 percent school completion rate. About one third of the province's 1998-1999

TABLE 2
School Completion Rates and Location of School Change in the 1998 Aboriginal Cohort

Location of School Change (High School Only)	Percentage of 1998 Aboriginal Cohort %	Six-Year Completion Rate (Graduation June 2004) %
No school changes	31.8	56.4
School-structure school change	18.0	58.0
Within-district school change	19.5	28.2
Between-district school change	30.4	29.8

Source: Aman (2006).

Aboriginal cohort moved from a school in one district to a school in another district. These Aboriginal students' six-year completion rate is nearly identical (29.8%) to the completion rate of students who changed schools within districts (28.2%).[11]

The Policy Challenge for Public School Systems

The identification of school change as a factor strongly correlated with impacts on the educational success of Aboriginal students raises important questions for policy-makers. Non-school-structure change may be driven by a number of external factors, and the factors driving school change among Aboriginal students in particular are not well understood. It is therefore necessary to better understand this phenomenon and to fashion and implement policies and practices to appropriately address the challenges generated by high Aboriginal student mobility.

Literature from Australia (Hotten et al., 2004) and the United States (Rumberger et al., 1999) examines various interventions designed to address impacts of student mobility and may provide useful lessons for supporting Aboriginal school success in Canada. "Newcomer" programs have been put in place in some jurisdictions to better meet the needs of students who are mobile across schools, while other jurisdictions focus on retaining students experiencing residential disruption. Still other programs tend to feature strategies, such as peer support, academic support, staff development, and improved cross-jurisdiction communication and record sharing. Transportation assistance, targeted risk prevention programs, and programs that aspire to increase community integration are other interventions.

While the findings reported here were generated by a large-scale quantitative analysis, more qualitative and ethnographic work is needed to provide refined information on the extent and nature of Aboriginal student mobility. Also needed is research at the school level to analyze how current practices address issues of student mobility and school completion.

Finally, it is important to exercise caution in framing future courses of inquiry. While residential mobility among Aboriginal families is known to be high, and high student mobility has been shown to be strongly associated with poor school outcomes, it would be a grave error to frame this issue as a "problem" resting with Aboriginal families. The purpose in gaining a greater understanding of the extent and nature of Aboriginal student mobility must be to assist educators in working with Aboriginal students, families and communities toward consistently higher graduation rates and higher achievement in school.

Notes

1 Band-operated schools are attended by less than 10 percent of Kindergarten to Grade 12 Aboriginal students in British Columbia (see Postl, 2005).

2 This information is reported on the British Columbia Ministry of Education web site. See <www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/perf2006.pdf>.

3 In this paper, the term "Aboriginal" refers to students who have self-identified as being of Aboriginal ancestry on the annual British Columbia Ministry of Education student data collection form (Form 1701). These students may include First Nations, Status Indians, Non-Status Indians, Métis, or Inuit. The authors recognize that the definition of these terms is contested. Students voluntarily declare themselves Aboriginal, but may choose not to do so consistently every year. For this analysis, we considered students who, at some point in their school career, had declared themselves to be Aboriginal on this school census form.

4 The socio-economic variables were rate of educational attainment less than high school, unemployment rate, proportion of families earning under $20,000 a year, average family income, and the proportion of Aboriginal ethnic origin. These variables may not perfectly reflect conditions associated strictly to school catchment areas, particular demographic groups residing within the area, or be accurate over the period examined, but were considered comprehensive and salient.

5 The Social Deprivation Index was the sole measure of health, education, and economic conditions associated with the Aboriginal populations of communities (disaggregated from non-Aboriginal populations of the communities) that was available province-wide.

6 Wherever there is a 10 percent increase of families living on low incomes in the school neighbourhood, graduation rates diminish by 0.05 percent.

7 Where school change involves a change of school districts, the expected probability of graduation is diminished by 16 percent.

8 The incidence of non-Aboriginal students changing high schools between and within school districts was 18 percent in this study.

9 School completion is defined as a six-year completion rate in this analysis. On entry to Grade 8, students are given six years to complete high school. Students who finish before six years are counted in calculating the school's completion rate. Students, who do graduate, but take longer than six years, are not counted in the school's completion rate.

10 See <www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/perf2006.pdf>.

11 It should be emphasized that school change is not necessarily the result of residence change. This data set did not allow for analysis of this factor. School change may be the result of school choice exercised by the student, program availability, residence move, or other individual considerations.

University Attainment of the Registered Indian Population, 1981–2001

A Cohort Approach

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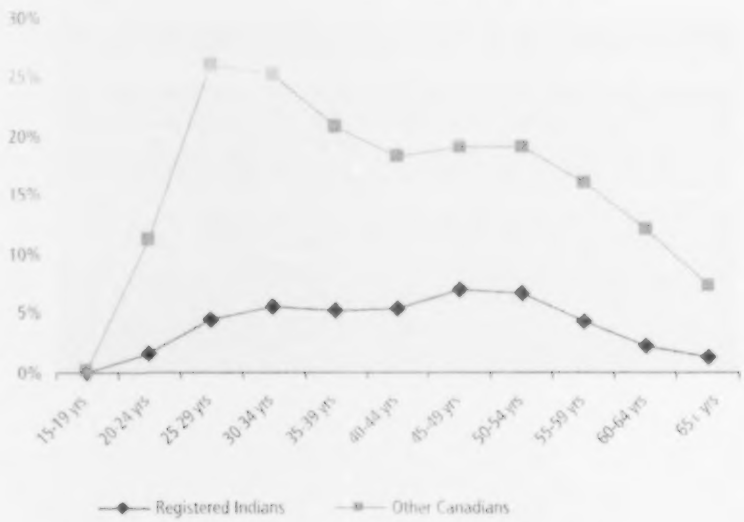
The gap between the educational and labour market outcomes of Canada's Aboriginal peoples compared to non-Aboriginal Canadians has been extensively documented (Hull, 2005; Mendelsohn, 2006). Recent literature, however, has found encouraging signs of progress: improvements have been observed in high school and non-university post-secondary completion rates (Maxim and White, 2005). It has also been shown that Aboriginal people who graduate from university encounter labour market outcomes similar to those of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. These results are reflected in the improvement in the Registered Indian Human Development Index (Beavon et al., 2004) in which basic functional literacy (Grade 9 achievement) is an essential component.[1]

However, while these developments are to be celebrated, they do not tell the whole story. Specifically, educational improvements within the Registered Indian population have not kept pace with the increasing educational attainment experienced by non-Aboriginal Canadians, particularly with regard to completion of university degrees. This situation is of particular importance given the increasing focus of Canada and other OECD countries on improving educational outcomes of children and youth to engage and reap benefits in an increasingly competitive and changing global and knowledge-based economy. Recently published statistics

FIGURE 1
Proportion of Registered Indians and Other Canadians with a University Degree, 2001



show higher rates of university enrolment, which reflect the need for higher educational requirements for occupations in the new global economy (Statistics Canada, 2005).

This article uses a cohort analysis approach to analyze census data to show the persistence of the gap in university completion between Registered Indians[2] and other Canadians.[3] It should be noted that important historical events have affected the Registered Indian population over time such as the enactment of Bill C-31 in 1985 and the incomplete enumeration of reserves in the Census. These data issues and their possible implications are discussed at length in the forthcoming comprehensive report on this subject. This article refers to data on the highest level of schooling for the Registered Indian and other Canadian populations during the 1981, 1986, 1991, 1996, and 2001 census periods.

Overall University Attainment of Registered Indians and Other Canadians in 2001

As shown in Figure 1, Registered Indians are far less likely than other Canadians to have earned a university degree, at all age groups. One point of interest is the age groups in which both populations have the highest proportion with a university degree. For the Registered Indian population, older age cohorts (30 years and older) appear to possess slightly higher proportions with a university degree than younger ones; in contrast, among other Canadians the younger cohorts have higher proportions with university degrees followed by the middle-aged groups of 40-44 and 45-49 year olds. For the 25-29 and 30-34 age groups, the proportion of other Canadians with a university degree is over five times that of the Registered Indian population.

FIGURE 2
Proportion of the Other Canadian Population with a University Degree, Seven Cohorts Aged from 1981 to 2001

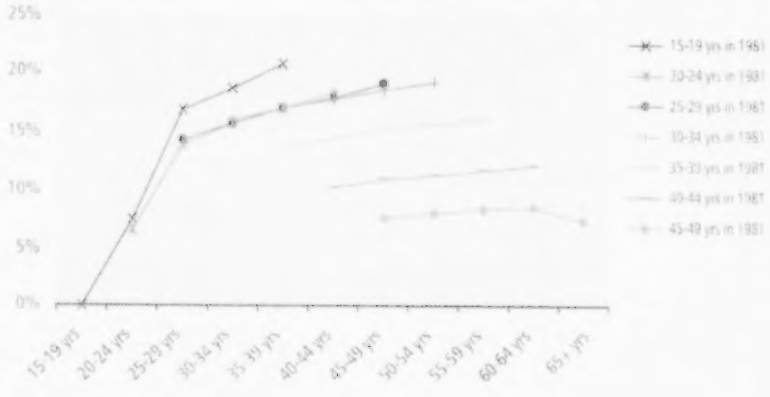
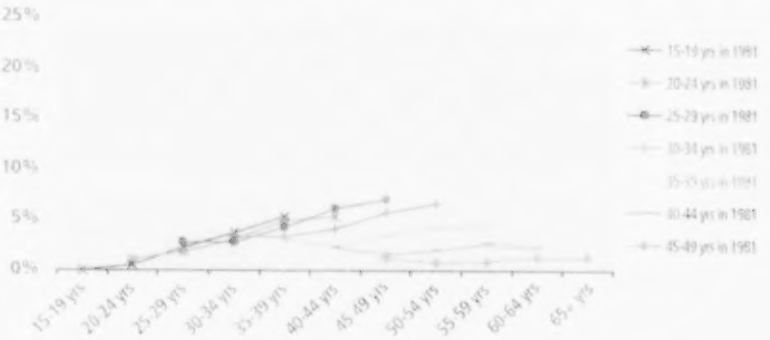


FIGURE 3
Proportion of Registered Indians with a University Degree, Seven Cohorts Aged from 1981 to 2001



Age Cohort Analysis

Using this analytical approach, we can track the progress of seven age cohorts from 15-19 years to 45-49 years from 1981 to 2001. This allows us to observe the extent of improvement in educational performance. Intuitively, each cohort would show

some improvement over its predecessor; however, for the "gap" between Registered Indians and other Canadians to close, improvements made by the Registered Indian population would have to outstrip those made by other Canadians.

Figures 2 and 3 depict the progress of the seven age cohorts in the other Canadian and Registered Indian populations through the 20-year time period. The age cohort trend lines can be described as "connecting the dots" from a particular age cohort beginning in the 1981 Census and aging it through successive census periods until the last census period in 2001 is reached. This results in an age cohort trend line composed of five discrete census data points for each of the seven age cohorts.

For the other Canadian population, all age cohort lines show progress in attainment of university credentials from 1981 to 2001 particularly for the younger age cohorts. After 20 years, the age cohorts of 15-19, 20-24, and 25-29 year olds in 1981 have the highest proportions with a university degree in 2001. The older age cohorts possess much flatter trend lines or slopes than their younger counterparts during this period indicating only small increases in the attainment of a university degree, which is to be expected.

For the Registered Indian population, however, age cohort lines for those under the age of 35 in 1981 show only slight progress in attainment of university credentials from 1981 to 2001. Unlike those of other Canadians, the age cohorts of 25-29 and 30-34 year olds in 1981 had the highest proportions with a university degree in 2001.

Although not shown graphically in this article, one can also examine the gender differences in age cohort progress in obtaining a university degree. For the other Canadian male population, the age cohort that experienced the largest gain in the proportion obtaining a university degree over the 20-year time frame were 15-19 year olds. However, the proportion of the population obtaining a university degree for this age cohort in 2001 was similar to the other four youngest cohorts at around 20 percent.

For the "gap" between Registered Indians and other Canadians to close, improvements made by the Registered Indian population would have to outstrip those made by other Canadians.

Likewise, for the other Canadian female population, all age cohorts except the oldest (45-49 years) experienced gains in the proportions with a university degree over the 20-year period. However, the two youngest cohorts of 15-19 and 20-24 year olds made the largest gains in the proportion of individuals obtaining a university degree from 1981 to 2001, increasing from 0 to 21 percent and 7 to 18 percent respectively.

For Registered Indian males, progress in obtaining a university degree was small for all seven age cohorts over the 20-year period from 1981 to 2001. Some slight gains were experienced by the 15-19 and 20-24 year old cohorts from 1981 to 2001, increasing from 0 to 4 percent and 1 to 3 percent respectively. The age cohorts of 25-29 and 30-34 year olds possessed the largest proportions with a university degree at the end of this period in 2001. However, it should be noted that decreases in the proportions obtaining a university degree occurred between the 1981 and 1986 censuses for all age cohorts except for the two youngest. To date, there is no explanation to account for this decrease between these two census years. However, it may be due to changes in the participation of First Nations reserves in the census.

For the Registered Indian female population, there was progress for all age cohorts in the proportions obtaining their university degree from 1981 to 2001. In particular, the progress, although small, was almost double that experienced by their male counterparts over the same period. Over the 20-year period, it was the youngest three age cohorts of 15-19, 20-24, and 25-29 year olds that experienced the largest gains overall. But similar to Registered Indian males, it was the 25-29 and 30-34 year old cohorts that obtained the largest proportions with a university degree in 2001.

Concluding Remarks

To summarize, the age cohort approach using census data represents a useful and age-specific tool for examining educational outcomes for the Registered Indian population, and for measuring the extent to which recent gains observed in terms of functional literacy lead to improvement and to a gradual closing of the well-being gap between Registered Indians and other Canadians. The key finding from this approach, that the university completion gap has been widening substantially, is instructive.

From 1981 to 2001, all seven age cohorts for the other Canadian population experienced an increase in the proportion of those obtaining a university degree, with the largest gains over the 20-year period in the two youngest cohorts, although the next two oldest cohorts of 25-29 and 30-34 year olds achieved similar proportions with a university degree (20%) after 20 years. Unfortunately, the age cohorts in the Registered Indian population experienced small or very little change in their proportions over the same period. From a gender perspective, Registered Indian females experienced small noticeable gains in the proportions obtaining a university degree, particularly for the younger cohorts of 15-19 and 20-24 year olds in the 20-year period; however, Registered Indian females still greatly lagged behind other Canadian women in the proportions of those obtaining a university degree between 1981 and 2001.

The fact that Registered Indians appear to be falling further behind other Canadians in comparable age groups, in terms of post-secondary attainment, warrants concern. Post-secondary attainment is well known to be a key predictor of lifetime earnings potential (Howe, 2002). Research also shows that educational outcomes are themselves highly correlated with socio-economic status; thus, one finds higher educational success for children in families with higher levels of education and income (Gorard et al., 2001). Additionally, precursors, such as health status and emotional and behavioural disorders, have been shown to be related to social economic status where both adults and children of lower socio-economic levels suffer poorer health and are more likely to experience emotional and behavioural distress than families in higher social and income levels (Brownell et al., 2006).

Thus, while Registered Indians have made some progress in their social and economic standing in Canada in recent years, they remain far behind other Canadians in terms of socio-economic status. This means they may face additional barriers in further improving their life chances in the future. With higher educational credentials needed to obtain entry-level positions, Registered Indians and other Aboriginal peoples are at risk of stalling their current progress and ultimately falling further behind other Canadians.

Notes

1 The results presented in this article are excerpts from a forthcoming report to be published by the Research and Analysis Division of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

2 Only the Registered Indian population is suitable to this cohort analysis approach since comparable data for the other Aboriginal identity groups (North American Indian, Inuit and Métis) are not available prior to the 1996 Census. More importantly, some of these Aboriginal identity groups are heavily influenced by "ethnic mobility" factors that cause increases in population counts not solely explainable by traditional demographic factors (Guimond, 2003).

3 For the purposes of this analysis, the term "other Canadians" refers to the vast majority of citizens who are not Aboriginal as well as those Aboriginal people who are not Registered Indians (including Métis, Inuit, Non-Status Indians). "Registered Indians" are those individuals entitled under the *Indian Act* legislation to be registered as an Indian and thus able to receive benefits and rights as outlined under this Act.

Full references are available in the online version of this issue. It can be accessed by visiting the PRI web site at <www.policyresearch.gc.ca>

The National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

Aboriginal Success Stories

Roberta Jamieson
President
National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

The National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation (NAAF) offers proof-positive that our youth have ample personal resources to succeed if there is money available to empower them to change their own future and the future of their communities, making their full contribution to Canada.

NAAF is a registered charity with an eminent and professional board. It receives money from corporate donors, First Nations, organizations, individuals and federal, provincial and territorial governments. The Foundation is devoted to excellence and to providing Aboriginal youth with the tools necessary for achieving brighter futures. It encourages and empowers them by providing important career-planning information, by connecting them with industry, and by providing financial support for post-secondary studies in all disciplines.

Since 1988, NAAF has evolved into the largest non-governmental funding body for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis post-secondary students across Canada. This year alone, the Foundation provided post-secondary bursaries totaling $3.2 million to over 900 deserving First Nations, Inuit and Métis recipients from our Scholarships and Bursaries program. They are a shining testimony to aspiration, personal triumph, achievement, hard work, overcoming barriers, and the pursuit of promising futures.

The Foundation already provides First Nations, Inuit and Métis youth with more scholarship funding than any other agency in Canada outside the federal government. But we can – and must – do more! It would be misleading to admire the Foundation's success if we don't also recognize that there is another side to the story. Many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis students do not go on to high school, and if they do start, do not graduate. For them, for Canada, the potential for success decays into wasted potential, wasted opportunity, and dashed hope.

What would be a true "success" would be to alleviate the current unacceptable gap between the high potential and low achievement found among Aboriginal youth of Canada. Indeed this will not close on its own. Left unattended, it will widen and be passed on to the next generation and will be a costly burden for Canada to bear financially, socially, and politically if not addressed now.

According to research done by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards and released in November 2007, if we could close the gap between the education of First Nation, Inuit and Métis children and youth as compared to the Canadian population generally, there would be $71 billion added to Canada's Gross Domestic Product over the next ten years. Investment of public and private resources to realize the potential of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth is not an act of kindness;

Source: Fred Cattroll, courtesy of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

it is essential if Canada is to have a prosperous future.

In this context, the cost of providing First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth access to better educational opportunities is a handsome investment to be realized in the very near future and it is an investment that will generate significant returns for generations to come.

And there is another important dividend: alleviating the challenge of labour shortages that reduce economic productivity. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people will constitute an important share of Canada's labour force – especially if the gap is closed (See the article from Jeremy Hull in this volume). Aboriginal people will account for a growing share of Canada's annual natural population increase between now and 2017 — a population increase consisting entirely of children and youth.

Closing the gap is too complex for the federal government to do it alone – provincial and territorial governments, Aboriginal communities and organizations, professional associations, the private sector, unions and employers must also be strongly committed. The National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation is well-positioned to be a key player in combining these resources to achieve the success we need. These actions constitute "Success."

Information, is on the Foundation's web site, <www.naaf.ca>.

Aboriginal Youth in the Canadian Labour Market[1]

Jeremy Hull
Consultant
Prologica Research Inc.

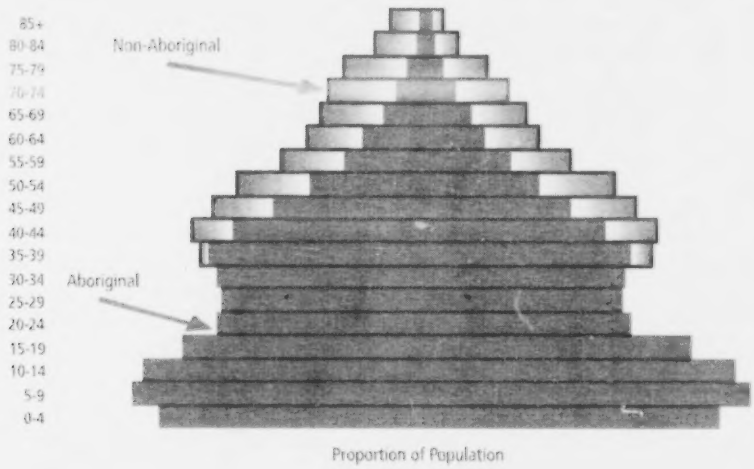
In recent years, alarms have been raised about a possible crisis in the Canadian labour force — a shortage of labour caused by low birth rates and the aging of the Canadian population. Studies have suggested that this declining growth of the labour force will have a negative impact on the economy.

Proposed responses to this crisis have focused on retaining older workers in the labour force and attracting immigrant workers, and the growing Aboriginal labour has not been given much attention. The rapid growth rate of the Aboriginal labour force presents an opportunity to offset these demographic pressures to some extent and could benefit both Aboriginal people and the Canadian economy.

The Aboriginal population, particularly Aboriginal youth, tend to have lower rates of labour force participation than other Canadians. Past research has shown that this is related to the levels of education attained and to geographic location, among other factors. Readers should keep in mind that this article is a simplified presentation of a complex set of issues, and that the Aboriginal population is in reality much more diverse than described here. These details are important from a policy perspective, and we will return to the need for more detailed analysis in the conclusions.

The Aboriginal population[2] is much younger than the general Canadian population. In 2001, the

FIGURE 1
Distribution of the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Populations of Canada in 2001

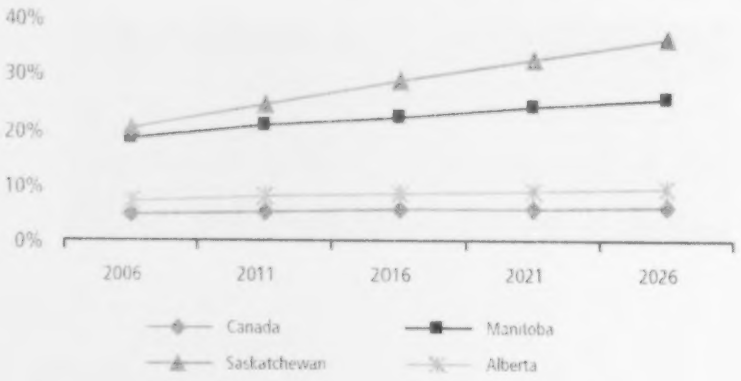


largest age group among the Canadian population, the "baby boom" generation, was 35-49 years old, while the largest Aboriginal age group was 0-14 years old (See Figure 1). By the year 2021, the bulk of Canadian baby boomers will be over the age of 55, while the largest Aboriginal age group will be 20-34 years old. The current Aboriginal age structure, combined with a relatively high birth rate result in a projected growth of the Aboriginal population, ages 15-64, of 48 percent between 2001 and 2026. In contrast, the general Canadian population within this age group is projected to reach its peak in about 2016, after which it is expected to remain static.

The youth segment of the Aboriginal population will continue to increase, even after the youth segment of the Canadian population begins to decline. The younger segment of the Aboriginal population, 15-29 years old, is projected to grow rapidly from 2001 to 2011, and then a little more slowly after 2011. By 2026, this population is expected to be 37 percent larger than in 2001. During this same period, the general Canadian population in the 15-29 year-old age range is expected to peak in 2011 and then to decline so that it will be only six percent higher in 2026 than it was in 2001.

In Canada it is estimated that approximately 25,000 Aboriginal youth turn 15 each year, and this number is expected to increase after 2016. Between 2001 and 2026, more than 600,000 Aboriginal youth will come of age to enter the labour market, with the potential to make a major contribution to the Canadian economy. Five provinces – Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia – will each see approximately 100,000 or more Aboriginal youth turning 15 over that time period.

FIGURE 2
Projected Aboriginal Share of the Population 15-29 Years Old Canada and the Prairie Provinces, 2006-2026



The Aboriginal population is a small proportion of the total Canadian labour force, but it is a large proportion of the labour force in some provinces and regions. In 2001, the Aboriginal population accounted for about four percent of the population aged 15-64 in Canada. Although the Aboriginal population will grow more quickly than the general Canadian population, it will still only reach about five percent of the total labour force population by 2026. However, the Aboriginal population is a much larger component in some provinces and regions, especially Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Northern Canada. In Saskatchewan, the Aboriginal population already makes up a large share of the total labour force, and is projected to be 28 percent of the labour force age group by 2026. In Manitoba, this proportion is expected to reach 22 percent in 2026, while in Alberta it is expected to reach eight percent. In Northern Canada, including Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, the Aboriginal population makes up a large majority.[3]

The Aboriginal population is a large and growing proportion of the younger population in Saskatchewan and Manitoba and is also significant in Alberta. As illustrated in Figure 2, 36 percent of the younger labour force population in Saskatchewan is expected to be Aboriginal in 2026. In Manitoba, this proportion is projected

FIGURE 3
Employment Rate of the Population 15-64 Years Old
by Educational Certification and Identity, Canada, 2001

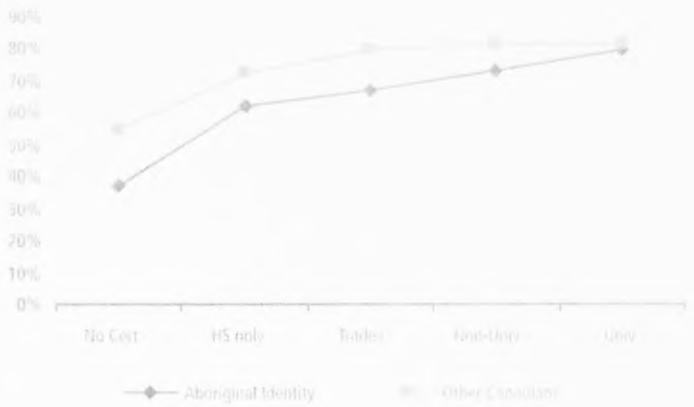
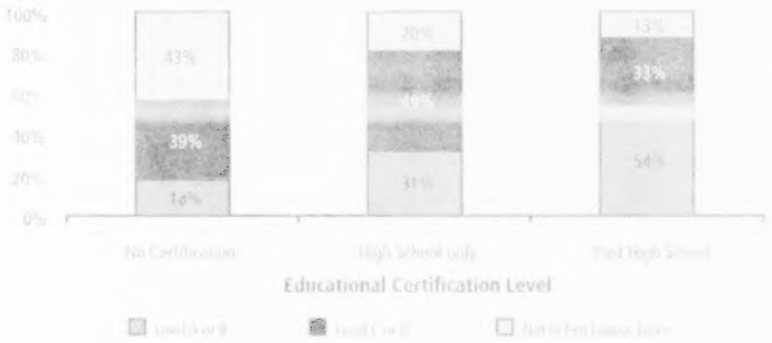


FIGURE 4
Occupational Level of the Aboriginal Population 15-64 Years Old
By Educational Certification, Canada, 2001



to be 28 percent, while in Alberta, it is projected to be nine percent. While the size of the Aboriginal populations in these three provinces is similar, the size of the other Canadian population is much larger in Alberta. In addition, provincial immigration trends are quite different in these provinces.

To a large degree, educational attainment reduces the employment gap between the Aboriginal and general Canadian populations. A key factor in labour market participation is the completion of various levels of educational certification, such as a high school graduation certificate or a post-secondary certificate or degree.[4] As illustrated in Figure 3, the employment rate among the Aboriginal population increases with educational certification, reaching a rate of 80 percent for those with university degrees or certificates, equal to the employment rate of the general Canadian population with this level of education. At lower levels of education, however, there is a large gap between the Aboriginal and other Canadian employment rates, especially among those without any type of high school or post-secondary certification.

Occupational skill levels are also strongly influenced by educational certification. Generally, professional, technical and managerial occupations (shown as levels A and B in Figure 3) require high school completion and either post-secondary training, apprenticeship or extensive experience and on-the-job training. Semi-skilled and unskilled occupations (levels C and D) usually require a high school education or less. Among the Aboriginal population without any certification, only 18 percent have worked in level A or B occupations. Among those with a high school certificate, this increases to 31 percent of the population, while among those with post-secondary certification, the proportion in level A or B occupations increases to 54 percent. A large proportion of those without certification, 43 percent, were not in the experienced labour force at all (See Figure 4).

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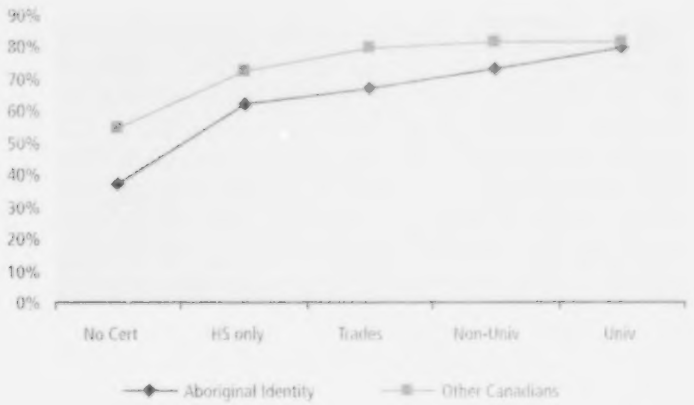

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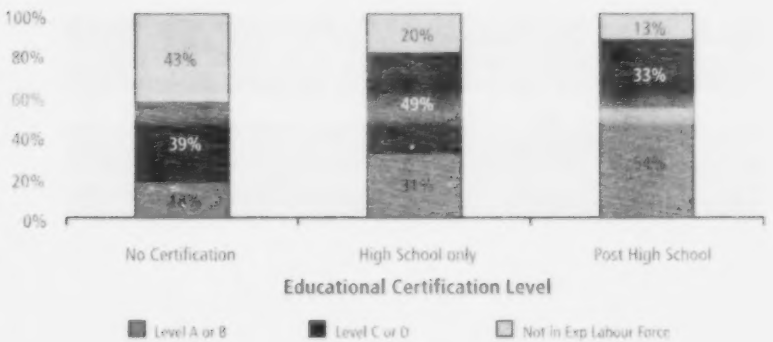

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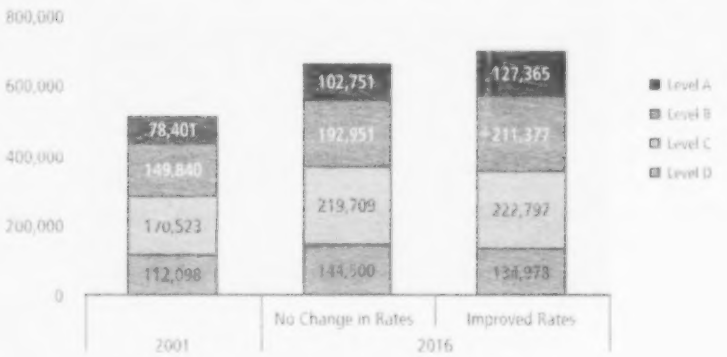
Rates of educational certification are relatively low among Aboriginal youth. In 2001, only 40 percent of Aboriginal youth, ages 15-29, had high school or higher certification, compared to 65 percent of other Canadian youth. Among both the Aboriginal population and other Canadians these proportions are much higher for those who are 30-49 years old, and the gap between the Aboriginal population and others is somewhat smaller for this age group. Within this age group, 59 percent of the Aboriginal population and 79 percent of the other Canadian population have some type of educational certification. This reflects educational patterns in Canada, where many people continue to pursue educational qualifications throughout their lives. This is especially the case among the Aboriginal population. The older the Aboriginal population is, the greater the proportion who have achieved certification (Hull, 2004).

Educational attainment has been increasing among the Aboriginal population. Studies of Aboriginal educational attainment have consistently shown increasing educational levels among the Aboriginal population and increasing numbers of Aboriginal students completing high school and attending post-secondary colleges and universities. These educational trends are strongest among the Aboriginal population over the age of 25. For example, between 1991 and 2001 the proportion of the Registered Indian population, aged 25-44, with secondary or post-secondary certification increased from about 52 to 61 percent.[5]

FIGURE 5
Projected Aboriginal Experienced Labour Force 15-64 Years Old in 2016, Comparing Educational Certification Scenarios, Canada



The size of the projected Aboriginal labour force depends in part on Aboriginal educational trends. In looking at future trends, we can assume that there will be no change in educational attainment levels, or we can assume that Aboriginal educational levels will continue to increase as they have done over the past ten years. Under the first assumption, the Aboriginal labour force is projected to increase from 510,000 in 2001 to 650,000 in 2016. Under the second assumption, the Aboriginal labour force is expected to increase to 690,000 in 2016. In other words, there will be approximately 40,000 more Aboriginal people participating in the labour force if Aboriginal educational levels continue to improve than there will be if educational levels do not improve (See Figure 5).

Higher educational levels also result in larger numbers in higher skill level occupations, and lower numbers in lower skill level occupations. The assumption that there will be increasing educational levels results in about 25,000 more Aboriginal people in level A occupations, 18,000 more in level B occupations, and a reduction of about 10,000 in level D occupations by 2016. Since the jobs that are most likely to experience labour shortages are the more highly skilled occupations, educational trends will help determine the extent to which Aboriginal labour can help meet the demand.

The impact of an increase in the Aboriginal labour force will be different in various provinces and regions. Under the improving educational assumption, the number of Aboriginal labour force participants is projected to increase by more than 7,000 in Ontario by 2016. In the four western provinces, improved educational levels will result in 5,000 to 6,500 additional Aboriginal labour force participants, depending on the

province. In Northern Canada, the impact is projected to be about 3,000 additional labour force participants, while in Québec and the Atlantic region, the impact will be about 2,700 and 2,000 respectively.

Conclusions

It can be concluded that the Aboriginal labour force is a significant potential resource within Canada — a resource that is currently underutilized in the economy. Hundreds of thousands of young Aboriginal people will enter the work force over the coming years. If their educational levels remain at current levels, however, many will not find a place in the labour market, or they will be employed in lower skill level occupations. This will be detrimental to the economy as a whole since the greatest demand for labour is expected to be in higher skill level occupations. On the other hand, if Aboriginal educational levels continue to improve as they have over the past decade or more, the numbers of Aboriginal people in more highly skilled occupations will increase. Any success that can be achieved in improving Aboriginal educational levels will pay dividends to the Canadian economy by improving the availability of skilled labour and reducing labour shortages. These improvements will be especially important in certain provinces and regions, particularly in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, Northern Canada, Alberta and the Atlantic region.

Three complementary strategies are suggested to increase the participation of Aboriginal people in the economy:

1. **Strengthen the basic elementary-secondary educational system** to better prepare Aboriginal youth for the labour market and further education. While the numbers of Aboriginal high school graduates and post-secondary participants have increased, Aboriginal completion rates remain much lower than the Canadian average. In addition, those Aboriginal youth who are successful in completing various levels of education are taking longer than others to achieve this success. At this point, the focus needs to turn to strengthening the quality of basic education received by Aboriginal students, including the key threshold of high school completion.
2. **Expand opportunities for Aboriginal adults to obtain needed educational qualifications and occupational training.** The reality, as described above, is that many Aboriginal adults continue their educational pursuits over the course of many years; indeed this is a strength among Aboriginal students. While post-secondary education institutions and programs have become increasingly flexible in making programs available to mature students, more attention needs to be paid to employer-based training programs that can help integrate Aboriginal youth into the labour force.
3. **Focus on selected industries, regions and populations.** It is apparent that there are key occupations and industries, such as skilled trades within the construction industry, that are likely to face labour shortages, and that some of these industries are located within regions where there is a relatively large Aboriginal labour force. However, the details concerning specific geographic regions, industries, and occupations are not well-known and need to be identified, as do the characteristics of the Aboriginal populations of these regions. Aboriginal peoples are diverse, and this diversity must be considered when designing policies and programs. It will be important to identify these industries, regions and populations to ensure that educational and training efforts designed for Aboriginal students will produce graduates who meet the needs of the economy while fulfilling their own aspirations.

Notes

1 This summary is based largely on the study, *Aboriginal Youth in the Canadian Labour Market*, prepared by Jeremy Hull for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Research and Analysis Directorate, June, 2006. Data used here are derived from Clatworthy 2006, Statistics Canada 2005 and from the 2001 Census of Canada.

2 Unless otherwise stated the Aboriginal population referred to in this paper is the population who identified themselves as Aboriginal on the Census of Canada.

3 Differences in projection methods for the Aboriginal population (Clatworthy, 2006) and the Canadian population (Statistics Canada) make it difficult to directly compare these two sets of projection numbers in the North.

4 Other factors, such as age, gender and geographic location are also important (See Hull, 2004).

5 The "Registered Indian" (those identifying themselves on the Census as registered under the *Indian Act*) is more stable from Census to Census and provides a better indicator of trends than the general Aboriginal population.

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Factoring that Affects the Education and Work Transitions of First Nations Youth

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The idea that young adults follow a linear and sequential movement toward their education and career goals has been challenged by researchers (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001; Looker and Dwyer, 1998; Raffe, 2003; te Riele, 2004). In particular, the idea of linear transitions may not acknowledge the complexity of pathways: the focus on school-to-paid-work transitions may neglect other important youth transitions, and the individualism of pathways discourse mistakenly assumes that pathways are equally accessible to all young people (Raffe, 2003). Some writers argue that the idea of a linear pathway was only ever applicable to a minority of young people (cf., Dwyer and Wyn, 2001). For example, Looker and Dwyer (1998) reported findings from longitudinal studies of youth in Canada and Australia, which suggested that the transition experiences of rural youth are qualitatively different from those of urban youth and do not conform to the "linear pathways" metaphor.

Some findings related to rural youth also describe the experiences of First Nations youth. However, little empirical work focuses on the transition process for these youth. One exception is Gabor et al. (1996), who suggested that a lack of housing, transportation, and employment opportunities limited the options for Aboriginal youth who wished to stay on reserves. Our article takes a closer look at the institutional and personal factors that influence the career pathways of First Nations youth in Alberta, Canada. We consider issues pertinent to the kindergarten to Grade 12 system as well as access to post-secondary education (PSE) and work opportunities for Aboriginal youth living on a reserve in southern Alberta.

This study began with an evaluation of a provincial summer work experience program, which encourages high school students to enter health care occupations. Thirty interviews or focus groups were conducted between 2004 and 2006 with interviews fully transcribed. Computer software NUDIST 6 was used to code data and organize our analysis.

Secondary Schooling On and Off Reserves

Canadian provinces have jurisdictional control over education except with respect to First Nations education, which since Confederation has been the responsibility of the federal government, although control can be delegated to communities. In fact, steps have been taken by many First Nations communities over the past 30 years to re-assert their inherent rights with regard to control and management of their educational institutions. For example, the reserve that we focus on in this paper[1] has had "band control" over education since 1988; that is, the band's school board is able to hire teachers and operate schools within the constraints of funding provided by the federal government.

That said, the experience on the ground with respect to jurisdiction is not always cut and dried. For example, provincial governments may enact education laws that affect First Nations students in the provincial school system, while many schools on reserves follow provincial curriculum (Morgan, 2002).

Of particular interest for the purposes of this analysis is the fact that an increasing proportion of children from families living on the reserve attend provincial schools (off reserve). Reportedly, this involves over half of high school age students. Money is transferred from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to these provincial schools via "tuition agreements."

Participants in the study suggest that students attend schools off the reserve for various reasons. Some families live closer to schools located off the reserve. Others find it difficult to access housing on the reserve. For high school age students, schools in urban centres, with amenities close by, are appealing. Further, students who plan to pursue post-secondary education may attend school off the reserve in an effort to ease the transition. The reserve schools may be perceived as providing less rigorous preparation for PSE.

To some extent, this perception becomes self-fulfilling since the "choices" of families to attend school on or off the reserve have an effect on the student mix which, in turn, affects programming. For example, if a disproportionate number of students with special needs attends schools on the reserve (as a school district representative suggested), programming will be oriented more to these students. Further, funding for these students is reportedly less in reserve schools than provincial schools, creating additional challenges. Also, if teacher contracts are less favourable on reserves compared to provincial schools (as was reported in interviews), it may be more difficult to attract and retain teachers. These factors affect perceptions and the ability of reserve schools to retain students generally and "academic" students in particular (See also Steinhauer, 2007).

School staff on this reserve also noted challenges in trying to provide work experience and other career exploration opportunities for students, because of the size of the reserve, a lack of public transportation, limited placement opportunities, and scheduling challenges. For example, it can be difficult to find supervisors and placements for students interested in skilled trades work on reserves, because of the lack of an employer base. Placements off reserve are also difficult to secure, because reserve schools must compete with provincial schools to secure work placements with employers. Arranging transportation for students on a large reserve can be challenging. Therefore, it is predictably more difficult for students attending school on reserves to develop clearly defined horizons for action with respect to further education and work. These observations are consistent with the observation that rural communities across Canada find it more difficult to implement effective school-to-career strategies (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006), although the poor conditions within First Nations communities arguably add to the challenge (Armstrong, 2001; White and Maxim, 2007).

Access To and Challenges of Post-Secondary Education

After completing high school, students' PSE pathways are affected by the availability of funding, the availability of further education opportunities on or near the reserve, and the support provided by institutions for Aboriginal students.

Although status Indians in Canada are theoretically eligible for PSE funding, the Assembly of First Nations estimated that over 8,000 Aboriginal applicants did not receive funding in 2000-2001 (Malatest and Associates, 2004: 20). In the community in southern Alberta that we focus on, a band representative noted that they have been able to fund fewer than half of the applicants requesting funding in recent years. Funding is allocated to students by First Nations and Inuit organizations according to their priorities and eligibility criteria. However, citing an increase in costs and the number of eligible students, the federal government's Post-secondary Student Support Program, launched in 1989, apparently introduced funding restrictions for Indian and Inuit post-secondary students (Wotherspoon and Satzewich, 2000). Therefore, the increasing educational attainment of First Nations students essentially means that more students compete for fewer resources. The assumption within funding guidelines of a linear, direct pathway also penalizes students who drop out, transfer institutions or programs, or fail their year.

Although educators encouraged students to go directly to university, a more common route for First Nations students is to take two-year college programs that transfer to university programs. Of the funded students from the reserve we focused on, just over half attended college and the remainder attended university. It was often easier for students to get

accepted to some college programs and was a more comfortable transition. This is consistent with the finding that American Indians and some other minority groups in the United States disproportionately rely on community colleges as their point of initial access to higher education (Richardson, 1990, cited in Archibald et al., 2002).

Access to PSE options on reserves is another important element of learning and work pathways for First Nations students. On the reserve in our study, a band-operated college opened in the latter part of the 1980s in an old residential school building. Although it initially offered only upgrading, it currently brokers most courses through local colleges and universities in the areas of arts and science, oil and gas petroleum administration, Aboriginal culture, and social work. But some students taking programs at the tribal college are reportedly concerned about whether their certification will be recognized off the reserve. Aboriginal institutions may obtain accreditation of programs through an affiliation agreement with an accredited university or college (usually for a single course or program) or they may apply to provincially established accreditation agencies or bodies, which is a more complicated process (Morgan and Louie, 2006). As the president of a tribal college commented: "The only way to get recognition is to work as a mainstream institution" (Barnsley, 2005).

Alternatively, colleges can seek accreditation through the First Nations Accreditation Board (FNAB), which involves carrying out a self-study report followed by an on-site audit by the Board. However, the current status of the FNAB is unclear (Morgan and Louie, 2006) and provincial governments do not necessarily recognize this accreditation. Therefore, tribal colleges appear to face a catch-22 situation in that they are often established in opposition to mainstream institutions yet must harmonize with these institutions if their students' credentials are to be recognized off the reserve.

Beyond programs on the reserve, there were at least three colleges and two universities within 300 kilometres of the centre of the reserve. Most institutions provide some support for Native students, which is very important according to band representatives. In some ways, First Nations students who want to pursue PSE are similar to other rural youth in that they usually face higher financial costs and are likely to feel cut off from social support networks (Looker and Dwyer, 1998). But our interviews with a small group of students who aspired to PSE found that they also had childcare (e.g., younger siblings) or eldercare responsibilities. Therefore, the emotional as well as financial "costs" of further education can be significant. First Nations students continue to represent a minority within off-reserve institutions and often feel alienated, despite institutional efforts to provide support (Smith, 1999). The preceding discussion helps us to understand the reasons for the extended and non-linear pathways of many Aboriginal students (cf. Breaker and Kawaguchi, 2002).

Employment Opportunities on Reserves

The idea of youth transitions from formal education to work assumes that youth know about different career options, have adequate information to make decisions and will be able to access employment that matches their skills. However, the reserve that we focus on had an unemployment rate estimated at 40 to 50 percent by a staff member in the Employment and Skills Training department of the band government (interview, February 2006). This range is consistent with the figures reported in the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (Statistics Canada, 2001). The main employers were the tribal administration, departments and entities (e.g., health, education), and an agriculture project. Youth unemployment was also a concern. For example, although the Employment and Skills Training department ran a summer employment program for students, only about one third of applicants typically found placements. Since the average educational attainment of band members is increasing, this raises the important question of where the education will lead.

An important tension in the discussion of pathways for First Nations students relates to the goal of trying to attract professional people back to the community when much of the available work on the reserve is said to be unskilled, and opportunities, even for professional work, are limited in certain ways (cf. Gabor et al., 1996). For example, two of the largest employers on the reserve we focus on are health and education depart-

ments. Each employs about 200 people, and the number of Aboriginal professionals has increased over time. For example, a band representative noted that about 10 percent of teachers employed were Aboriginal in the late 1980s, whereas by 2006 this had grown to 90 percent of teachers with certificates. However, the school board is perceived to be "running out of positions" on the reserve for newly trained teachers (interview, February 2006). The development of viable and transparent pathways for young people, therefore, must include providing adequate academic preparation for PSE, opportunities for career exploration, support for the pursuit of PSE and, ultimately, a commitment to providing work for successful graduates.

Life Transitions and Culture

The preceding discussion has identified some of the institutional constraints faced by First Nations youth in the areas of compulsory education, post-secondary education, and work. While this analysis highlights reasons for their "non-linear" pathways, it is important to recognize that youth participants do not necessarily give the same priority to career transitions as do policy-makers. For example, participants valued family as well as a satisfying career and expressed a strong sense of responsibility to community. Further, culture and spirituality have been and continue to be critical in their pathways to adulthood. Most of the young people attended and took part in traditional ceremonies and some aspired to take on respected roles within cultural societies. They tended to see their cultural and spiritual traditions as foundational for their future development. Therefore, career transitions were seen as part of broader life transitions and students expressed the need to balance work goals with other goals related to family, spirituality, culture, and community. Again, a narrow focus on policy work related to school-to-work transition is not likely to capture these important aspects of youth pathways and is an area where further research is needed. Starting with where young people are rather than from a predetermined script regarding what youth pathways should look like is critical to such research.

Implications of Findings

The comment of a student participant that "I just go step by step" is typical of the incremental approach to pathways exhibited by the First Nations youth in our study. Although these young people aspired to PSE and had either completed or were on track to complete high school, their pathways were not linear. Our analysis identifies some of the institutional and personal factors related to compulsory schooling, PSE, and work that provide insight into student "choices."

To summarize, schools on reserves were perceived to be constrained in terms of resources for programming, higher than average numbers of students with special needs, and limited opportunities for career education. Students attending these schools had to deal with the perception that the quality of education was lower than that provided in provincial schools. Access to PSE was limited by the increasing scarcity of federal funding for First Nations students and the availability of programs on reserves. Further, the additional financial and emotional costs of moving away from home, and leaving behind peers, family, and culture posed challenges for youth. Finally, it was not clear that further education guaranteed work. Given these factors, youth did not make educational decisions in isolation from other decisions related to work, family, and community (cf. Looker and Dwyer, 1998).

Facilitating career pathways for First Nations youth requires greater attention to ensuring that students are made aware of and are able to meet the requirements for entry to PSE programs, and that educational institutions support Aboriginal students. Ideally, a broader range of PSE options would be available on reserves. But given the incremental process followed by young people and the large number of adults that are involved in upgrading on the reserve, it is equally important for employers (with government support) to provide opportunities for workers to "ladder" into more highly skilled positions. Finally, it needs to be clear to graduates that they will find rewarding work.

Note

1 This reserve is one of the largest in Canada with a population of about 10,000 people. Comparing this treaty area with others across Canada, it appears that educational attainment was marginally higher than the overall average while the employment ratio and income were marginally lower (Armstrong, 2001).

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When Teenage Girls Have Children
Trends and Consequences

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Whether to have a child or not is essentially a personal choice. But when a teenage girl becomes a mother, the consequences are felt not only by the mother and her child, but also by her family, her community and, ultimately, society at large.

In Canada, fertility of First Nations women of all ages, though still almost double that of other Canadian women, has been declining since the 1960s. Nation-wide, the fertility rate among First Nations women fell from 6.1 to 2.7 children per woman. This general decline in fertility, made possible by the increased availability of contraceptive methods, is the expression of these women's desire to have fewer offspring. Upon review of the birth data contained in the Indian Register, however, a completely different trend comes to light for First Nations teenage girls.[1]

Fertility of Young First Nations Women Since 1986

Contrary to what statistics for First Nations women of all ages indicate, fertility of First Nations teenage girls (under 20) has remained high since 1986 at about 100 births per 1,000 women (Figure 1). An analysis of aggregate fertility indicators, therefore, masks the situation peculiar to teenage girls. In fact, fertility of First Nations teenage girls is seven times higher than that of other Canadian teenagers. For First Nations teenage girls under 15 years of age, the rate is estimated to be as much as 18 times higher than that of other Canadians (Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2003).

The fertility rate among young First Nations women is highest in the Prairie provinces. In Manitoba for example, one teenage First Nations woman in eight had a child in 2004 (128 births per 1,000 women between 15 and 19 years of age).

International Comparisons

The magnitude of early motherhood among First Nations teenage girls in Canada becomes obvious when compared to the situation observed in other countries. Fertility of First Nations teenage girls in Canada is twice as high as that of American teenagers, who have the highest teen fertility of all industrialized nations.[2] In the United States, the US Congress, federal and state governments, and even private entities such as the *National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy*[3] have developed and implemented strategies to reduce fertility among teenage girls. The approach taken for developing and implementing these strategies rests on a common and documented understanding of the issue of early motherhood (US General Accounting Office, 1998).

According to international demographic statistics collected by the United Nations (Population Diversity, 2006) (Table 1), First Nations teenage girls in Canada have a fertility level comparable to that of teenage girls in least developed countries such as Nepal, Ethiopia and Somalia. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) invests in national programs designed to meet the needs of teenagers and youth in the areas of health, education, and the economy. The UNFPA's action aims at preventing unintended pregnancies and reducing sexually transmitted infections.[4] At the moment, in Canada, efforts to reduce fertility of First Nations teenagers are, at best, low-profile.

FIGURE 1
Fertility Rate of Registered Indian Women and All Canadian Women Between 15 and 19 Years of Age, Canada, 1986-2004

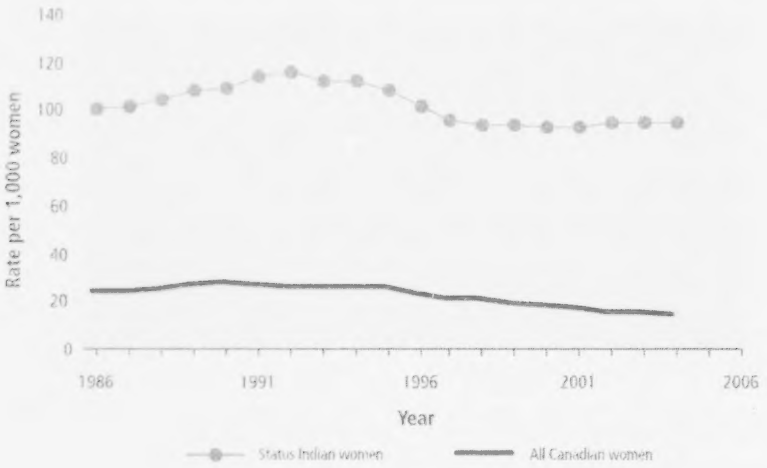

TABLE 1
International Comparisons of Fertility Rate Per 1,000 Women Between 15 and 19 Years of Age

Region, Country	Rate
Registered Indian	95
Canada	14
Africa	122
Asia	53
Europe	24
Latin America	86
North America	50
Oceania	40
Most developed countries	29
Developing countries	71
Least developed countries	136
Nepal	127
Ethiopia	111
Occupied Palestinian Territory	106
India	96
Somalia	75
Haiti	70
United States	41

Consequences of Early Motherhood

Generally speaking, early motherhood increases the vulnerability of a young First Nation woman who is already disadvantaged socio-economically by reason of her cultural background and gender. She is also at greater risk of academic under-achievement, reduced employability, an elevated risk of single parenthood and an increased dependence on income assistance. The combined effect of early motherhood and cultural background is glaring in terms of educational attainment. According to the 2001 Census of Canada, First Nations women aged 25 to 29 who had a child in their teens are twice as likely (20%) not to have completed Grade 9 than other First Nations mothers (10%) and other Canadian teenage mothers (8%).

From the moment of their birth, the future of children of First Nations teenage mothers is often compromised. American statistics on early motherhood indicate that teenage mothers are at greater risk of not receiving proper prenatal care (Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2003),[5] with the result that, at birth, the frequency of insufficient weight (Health Canada, 2005) and fetal alcohol syndrome (Eni et al., 2007; SSCAP, 2003) is higher among children of teenage mothers. The children of teenage mothers are also more at risk of neglect and abuse, and therefore at greater risk of being uprooted from their families and placed in the custody of social services.

Owing to the economic situation of teenage mothers (Grindstaff, 1990), their children grow up in conditions of poverty more often than children of older women. In 2001, 80% of First

Nations teenage mothers live in a family with a total income of less than $15,000 per year, compared to 27% of First Nations mothers aged 20 years or older (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Economic insecurity is just one aspect of these children's "ill-being." It is a recognized fact that teenage mothers are often unable to provide their children with a healthy environment conducive to their physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development (SSCAP, 2003).

Easy to be Judgmental

From the perspective of non-Aboriginal society, there is a strong temptation to interpret the choice of First Nations teenage girls to have a child as a bad one. For this largely urban society, a value judgment of this kind implies that other preferable lifestyle choices are available. Such *other lifestyle choices* would imply a more or less typical sequence of events:

1. at the very least, successfully completing high school, preferably post-secondary studies;
2. finding stable and gainful employment;
3. leaving the family home; and
4. as the case may be, starting a family.

For many young First Nations boys and girls living in communities virtually cut off from the rest of Canadian society, the reality is that education, employment and housing are deficient, sometimes outright lacking (Cooke et al., 2004; O'Sullivan et al., 2004). These *other lifestyle choices* are close to non-existent. So, can one reasonably speak of *bad* choices when these young people have children? Debating the issue of early motherhood without taking into consideration the living conditions of First Nations families and communities is overly simplistic and revealing of an ethnocentric vision of the world.

From a First Nations perspective, children and family have a special importance in traditional culture. There is a strong temptation to use culture as an explanation, not to say justification, for early motherhood among First Nations teenage girls: they have children early because that's the way it is in traditional First Nations culture. Given the consequences of early motherhood, however, the very idea of a teenage mother not being able to provide her child with a healthy environment conducive to physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual development is diametrically opposed to the spirit of traditional culture, which places the child at the centre of family and community life. Debating the relevance of early motherhood solely from the perspective of culture is also simplistic and indicative of a certain fatalism.

Regardless of the way in which early motherhood is judged or justified, the negative consequences for children in many families in First Nations communities are irrefutable. More often than not, early motherhood strengthens and contributes to dependence, from generation to generation.

Final Thoughts

At a time when the low fertility in Canadian families no longer ensures the replacement of generations, the high fertility of First Nations families is a true richness. Disregarding early motherhood and its intergenerational consequences, however, certainly does not serve to leverage this richness since it contributes to perpetuating the dependence of First Nations families and communities.

Let's be clear: Early motherhood in a healthy environment is what is at issue, not motherhood in itself, nor its level. Reflection and future actions must not focus on the number of children in First Nations families, but rather on the timing and the conditions into which they are born. Finally, the fertility rate of teenagers in the most developed countries, that is, 29 children per 1,000 women, is not a "standard." Societies that are organized differently and healthily for families could have more children born from young mothers. Even under excellent conditions, though, there is every reason to believe that teenage girls in those societies would post much lower fertility rates than First Nations teenage girls in Canada.

Notes

1 For more details on the source of data and the methodology, see N. Robitaille, A. Kouaouci and E. Guimond (2004). "La fécondité des Indiennes à 15-19 ans, de 1986 à 1997" in J.P. White, P. Maxim and D. Beavon (dir.), *Aboriginal Policy Research – Setting the Agenda for Change*, Thompson Educational Publishing Inc., Toronto.

2 <http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/teen/overview/overview.htm>

3 <http://www.teenpregnancy.org/>

4 <http://www.unfpa.org/french/about/index.htm>

5 <http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/teen/overview/overview.htm>

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Policies and Practice Reforms to Promote Positive Transitions to Fatherhood among Aboriginal Young Men[1]

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For many Aboriginal children and youth in Canada, having a father who is positively involved in their family life is only a dim idea that doesn't apply to them. According to Statistics Canada (2001), more than half of Aboriginal children growing up off-reserve live in single-mother-headed households. Many of these children have no contact with their fathers. The negative consequences of this phenomenon are considerable. More hopefully though, stories told by Aboriginal fathers in the first study of Aboriginal fatherhood in Canada suggest there is the potential for a new generation of positively involved Aboriginal fathers that urgently needs to be recognized and supported through program and policy reforms.

Why is Father Involvement Important?

Research has demonstrated the importance of positive involvement by fathers in their children's lives. Not only does fathering affect future fathering in a multi-generational pattern (Cowan and Cowan, 1987), but the degree and quality of father involvement show significant correlates with children's health outcomes (e.g., Ball and Moselle, 2007; Russek and Schwartz, 1997), developmental outcomes (e.g., Howard, Lefeber, Borkowski, and Whitman, 2006; Marsiglio, Day, and Lamb, 2000), and vulnerability to suicide (Brent, Perper, Moritz, and Liotus, 1995; Rubenstein, Halton, Kasten, Rubin, and Stechler, 1998). Father involvement protects children from engaging in delinquent behaviours (Zimmerman, Salem, and Notaro, 2000). Father absence in families which started out with a mother and father (compared to a planned same-sex parenting composition) has been linked to sub-optimal outcomes for children, ranging from higher risk of injury, asthma (Harknett, 2005), obesity (Strauss and Knight, 1999) and other health problems (Horn and Sylvester, 2002), speech-language pathology (Dawson, 1991), early school leaving (Painter and Levine, 2000), and weak labour force attachment (McLanahan and Sandefeur, 1994). Young fathers are less likely to be living with their children if their own fathers did not live with them during childhood (Furstenberg and Weiss, 2001). In the United States, the US Bureau of the Census (2003) reports that children in father-absent homes are five times more likely to be poor. According to Statistics Canada (2001), 35 percent of Aboriginal children living on-reserve and 50 percent of Aboriginal children living in urban centres live with one parent, usually their mother. In addition, Aboriginal children are grossly over-represented in the child welfare system.

The Findings: Disrupted Transmission of Fathering

A recently completed study opened up a new area of inquiry in Canada: the journeys of Aboriginal men becoming fathers (Ball, in press). Conducted under a community-university partnership and informed by indigenous research ethics, the study involved First Nations fathers on the research team and gathered stories of fatherhood from 73 First Nations and 7 Métis fathers. Among the 80 fathers, 36 lived on-reserve and 44 off-reserve. The number of children

they identified as "theirs" ranged from 1 to 11, with a mean of 3 children, though some fathers were not involved as caregivers or co-resident with their children. All of the fathers had at least one child under seven years of age. More than half (44) of the fathers who volunteered for this study lived with a partner. Nearly one third had either a high school diploma or some post-secondary education, which is a higher level of education than found by Statistics Canada (2001) for Aboriginal men aged 15 to 65 years. Fathers who participated were asked how best to share and mobilize knowledge gained in the study: in addition to community newsletters and journal articles, they overwhelmingly called for a video documentary and guide booklets where fathers could share their stories "in our own words." Consequently, six First Nations fathers participated in the production of a documentary on fatherhood (Ball and Asterisk Productions, 2007), and a range of print and online resources have been produced.

The study's findings illuminate the conditions associated with colonialism that have shaped fathers' self-reported challenges in "facing up to fatherhood," "learning to be a father," and "becoming a man." Nearly all fathers recounted negative experiences with their own fathers, or missing out on having a father altogether, which left them with little personal experience in positive fathering to draw upon when they became fathers themselves. The vast majority reported problems with substance abuse, psychological distress, and difficulties sustaining relationships with partners and relatives, preventing them from being as involved with their children as they would like. Fathers who were successfully involved with their children traced a personal journey of healing and coming to terms with their negative experiences in residential school or as secondary survivors of residential school effects. They saw healing as a first step on their journey to becoming involved fathers.

Fathers described a gradual process of accepting and learning to be fathers, often years after the birth of their first child. Most fathers had complex families involving children from many different relationships. Many fathers described a vacuum of support from formal institutions, such as primary health clinics and schools, dominated by mother-centrism. Promisingly, the Aboriginal women's movement is focusing some attention on men's roles, helping to create an environment that is conducive to social change among Aboriginal men. Fathers who were involved with their children often credited their partner's receptivity, patience and guidance in helping them to learn how to care for children. Shifting constructions of masculinity in some Aboriginal communities were also identified by some fathers as a factor that had enabled them to assume caregiving roles with their children. The desire among many Aboriginal peoples to bring traditional teachings forward into contemporary life is helping to focus attention on men's roles, including those surrounding child raising.

Some fathers reflected on the healing movement in Canada as a positive social force within their communities that is helping to foster a renewed understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and joys of parenting, including fatherhood. Other fathers expressed grave concern about the future for Aboriginal fatherhood. They reflected on the high rate of birth of Aboriginal children but the relatively low rate of Aboriginal children who are co-resident with their fathers. They pointed to the high rate of substance abuse, suicide, incarceration, and poverty among young Aboriginal men. Through stories from their own lives and those of other men in their communities, they described how being raised without sustained, positive contact with a father compounds the socio-historical, economic, and emotional challenges for the next generation of young men who will face the birth of a child.

Nearly all fathers recounted their own negative experiences with their own fathers, or of missing out on having a father altogether, which left them with little personal experience in positive fathering.

The Findings in Context: The Legacy of Residential Schools, *The Indian Act*

The role of Canadian legislation and policy in contributing to social

FIGURE 1
Correlates of Disrupted Fatherhood Affecting Aboriginal Youth

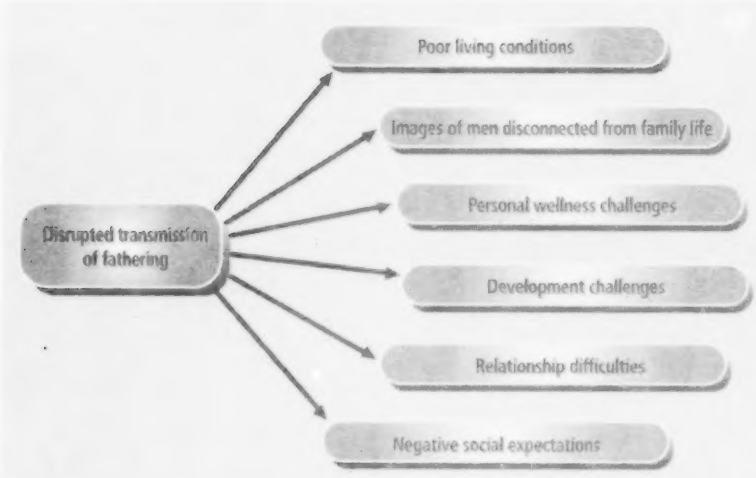
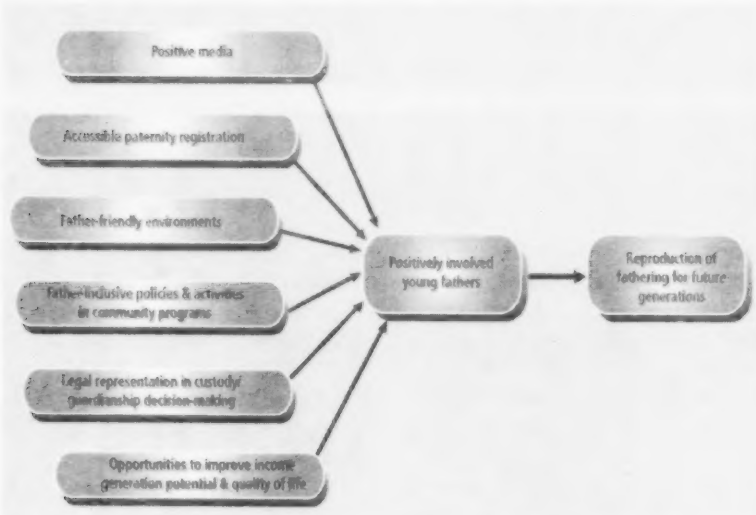


FIGURE 2
Strategies to Revitalize Positive Involvement of Aboriginal Young Men in Fathering


Positive media
Accessible paternity registration
Father-friendly environments
Father-inclusive policies & activities in community programs
Legal representation in custody/ guardianship decision-making
Opportunities to improve income generation potential & quality of life
Positively involved young fathers
Reproduction of fathering for future generations

exclusion of Aboriginal individuals and groups has been extensively documented (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Salée, 2006). Aboriginal fathers have suffered tremendous losses in terms of their role in family life, with deleterious effects on the health and wellness of their children as well as themselves (See Figure 1). Restricting traditional subsistence activities and the forced relocation from ancestral territories diminished the capacity of many men to fulfill their traditional role of providing for family members and passing on knowledge of how to live on the land (Chrisjohn and Young, 1997). Prohibition of ceremonial and sacred rites stemmed the flow of cultural knowledge and spiritual beliefs from fathers to children. Policies encouraging placement of children in residential schools (Fournier and Crey, 1997; Miller, 1996), and later in non-Aboriginal foster and adoptive homes (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2005), have disrupted traditional adult-child relationships for generations of Aboriginal people.

The devastating impacts of these policies are painfully evident in many Aboriginal men today. Sequelae include emotional abandonment, loss of cultural identity and personal pride, substance abuse, and physical and mental health problems (Mussell, 2005). Many men have difficulty sustaining intimate relationships, meeting family obligations, and connecting with their children (Smolewski and Wesley-Esquimaux, 2003). Census data confirm that, as a group, self-identified Aboriginal

males between 15 and 65 years of age have higher rates of unemployment, poverty, mobility, being unmarried, not completing high school, incarceration and homelessness than do non-Aboriginal males (Statistics Canada, 2001). One in five incarcerated men in Canada is Aboriginal (Statistics Canada, 2005). Young Aboriginal men die at a higher rate than the rest of the Canadian population as a result of suicide or unintentional injury (Health Canada, 2005). These factors contribute to the challenges of connecting with and caring for children.

These negative impacts are felt by subsequent generations. Poor living conditions, high mobility, extensive health problems, and negative social stigma exacerbate the challenges of developing positive father-child connections, as has been shown in research involving non-Aboriginal fathers (Roopnarine, Brown, Snell-White and Riegraf, 1995). In the recently completed study, many Aboriginal fathers reported feeling they have nothing positive to offer their children (Ball, in press); many suffered such low self-esteem that they did not think they were "worthy" of a relationship with their child.

Opportunities for Positive Action

Despite considerable challenges, the study found that many Aboriginal men have successfully assumed positive, caregiving roles with their children, including some who are lone parents to children whose mothers are absent. Fathers who were positively involved with their children described the rewards of fathering, but also the personal challenges and social barriers that an Aboriginal young man must overcome in order to connect with and care for their children. These findings point to ways to help Aboriginal young men avoid or address these challenges (See Figure 2).

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Changing media images of Aboriginal fathers. Images of Aboriginal young men as subsisting on the edges of society and chronically in trouble at school and with the law are prevalent in Canadian media. These images promulgate negative social expectations for Aboriginal boys as they begin to imagine possibilities for themselves in the future as fathers. In order to inspire Aboriginal youth to construct positive expectations for themselves in caring relationships as adults, there is a need for images in media that show Aboriginal men assuming the role of positively involved father, including fathers who take on primary caregiving roles after a mother's departure for the day (stay-at-home dads) or for good (lone fathers). For example, a Health Canada video by and for Aboriginal youth features popular Aboriginal musician and actor George Leach talking about his experience of becoming a responsible young father (Health Canada, 1997).

Moving beyond mother-centred policies and programs. The idea that promoting fathers' involvement can contribute to the health and development of all family members has not yet taken hold in health policy discourse (Ball and Moselle, 2007). The focus remains almost exclusively on the roles and needs of mothers, while well-baby clinics, child care and family support programs all communicate the belief that mothers are the critical link to child health and development — an approach that exacerbates young men's sense of worthlessness. Further, many agencies privilege the identity of mothers over fathers on child records. More information for expectant fathers and more effort on the part of health personnel is needed to a secure father's paternity designation on Aboriginal children's birth records — a first step in securing a young father's identification with fatherhood and involvement with his baby.

Programs targeting Aboriginal youth and families need to evaluate their effectiveness in welcoming the participation of Aboriginal fathers, and ensure their relevance to Aboriginal youth who are preparing for or learning fatherhood. Programs need to offer:

- male and Aboriginal staff;

- materials about a father's role in addition to maternal child care;
- activities that will interest both men and women; and
- policies that require accountability to fathers as well as mothers with critical incidents involving their child (Ball and Roberge, 2007).

Supporting healthy lifestyles and healing. In the study of Aboriginal fathers, a resounding theme was that the men needed time and support in order to "learn fatherhood," to accept their role and begin to assume the responsibilities that fatherhood entails. The first step, many fathers said, is to recognize and deal with personal challenges, especially substance abuse, anger management and other communication difficulties, and ineffective relationship skills. Accordingly, programs need to support healthy lifestyles, to address mental health and addiction issues, and to help expectant and new fathers develop the skills needed to form and sustain healthy family environments.

Sustaining connections as circumstances change. Aboriginal fathers often have difficulty sustaining connections with children over time. They may move for work or education. Some are unable to sustain relationships because of substance abuse, incarceration, or homelessness. As well, many fathers are overlooked when agencies intervene in situations involving separation and divorce, child protection, foster placement and adoption (Gough, Blackstock, Bala, 2005). More effort needs to be made to identify, locate, and involve fathers of children who receive social services or are taken into state care.

To strengthen father-child connections, funding is needed for father-child programs, and for activity programs targeting Aboriginal fathers and their children. Reforms are also needed to increase the transparency of laws and accessibility of legal aid for fathers implicated by decisions about child custody, visitation, and guardianship.

Looking Forward

Having positive expectations, listening to youth, and reaching out with positive role models and meaningful kinds of support will help young Aboriginal fathers to commit to becoming positively involved in their children's lives. The study reported here is a first step, demonstrating that many Aboriginal men are eager to be involved in research and to participate in sharing their stories of fatherhood. A larger program of research could contribute understanding different determinants of fathering, including varying family configurations, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and fathers' connections with their cultural community and traditional territory. For incarcerated Aboriginal men, research could inform the development of programs for fathers to initiate, sustain or re-build connections with their children. Research could illuminate the mediating impacts of positive fathers' involvement on children's health and development within varying family structures, including the prevalent patterns of non-co-resident and never-married Aboriginal parents, actively involved extended family members, and lone Aboriginal fathering. Research could help to discern whether there is a new generation of Aboriginal fathers embodying traditional values of father's involvement in providing and caring for children, and how they are negotiating a successful transition to positive fatherhood.

Note

1 This article draws upon the findings of a research study conducted by the author as part of the Fathers Involvement Research Alliance, and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Community-University Research Alliances program (File No. 833-2003-1002) as well as by the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development through the Human Early Learning Partnership. The views presented here are those of the author and do not represent the views of provincial or federal funding agencies, the FIRA group as a whole, or Aboriginal organizations.

Full references are available in the online version of this issue. It can be accessed by visiting the PRI web site at <www.policyresearch.gc.ca>

Lead Your Way!

The National Aboriginal Role Model Program encourages Aboriginal youth to reach their goals and lead healthy lifestyles

The National Aboriginal Role Model Program (NARMP) is a unique program organized by the National Aboriginal Health Organization. The program celebrates the leadership, innovation and accomplishments of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth aged 13 to 30. *"Lead Your Way!"*, the program's slogan, inspires Aboriginal youth to strive to reach their goals.

NARMP aims to promote healthy lifestyles and self-esteem among Aboriginal people, to strengthen Aboriginal identity, and to create positive public images of Aboriginal people.

In October 2006, 12 Aboriginal youth from across Canada were inducted into the program during a ceremony at Rideau Hall. The ceremony was presided over by Her Excellency, The

Jodie-Lynn Waddilove

31 years old from Munsee-Delaware Nation, Ontario
Fields of interest: Lawyer – civil litigation and corporate commercial law
2005-06 Role Model

My parents were the largest contributors to my success. I was born and raised on a small First Nation in southern Ontario. I did not know any lawyers or legal professionals growing up and my parents did not have post-secondary education. What my parents did have, however, was a strong commitment to their children. They raised us to be proud of our identity and culture, to possess a strong work ethic, to pursue our education, and to defy the stereotypes facing Aboriginal people, especially those of First Nations persons on-reserve. The pride and the values they instilled in me fuelled me to succeed by defying the odds and becoming a lawyer by the age of 26. As a lawyer in the Canadian justice system, I know that many more of our children can achieve what I have achieved if they have similar support and encouragement.

My biggest hope for young Aboriginal people across Canada is that they know and believe that they can succeed. The most important part of this is that they succeed while taking pride in who they are and while practicing their culture and traditions. Speaking from experience, there are many obstacles they will have to confront, including negativity, racism, sexism and stereotypes. But they can defy these things and persevere. There are many successful Aboriginal people who have accomplished great things and there are many more who will follow in their footsteps.

Jessica Dunkley

28 years old, Métis
Fields of interest: Second year medical student at University of Ottawa
2007-08 Role Model

I grew up learning very little about my culture. I am deaf. I could not understand my grandfather's stories about his life on the land in Manitoba. But when I met James Makokis, who eventually became the National Spokesperson for the National Aboriginal Role Model Program, my understanding of the people and the dynamics of our culture grew. My knowledge became enriched with James' sincere dedication to his language, his people and his traditions. His stories of his culture and family inspired me to rediscover the identity that I had all but lost before I met him.

There is a lot more hope today for Indigenous youth who feel they're at a disadvantage. For those who have disabilities, there are opportunities and possibilities for them to achieve their passion. I hope that by leading through example, I will be able to instill some confidence in our youth that anything in life is possible. We need to remove the illusion or stigma that is imposed on Indigenous people with disabilities. We need to show everyone what we can do. And the same goes for all Aboriginal youth. They have the power to achieve their dreams.

Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, who awarded each of the role models with an award in the form of a small crystal sculpture.

"All of you being honoured today give hope to so many people, both in your local communities and in the broader community of Canada," the Governor General said in a speech at the ceremony. "Through the choices you have made, and through your hard work every day, you clearly demonstrate to members of the First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities that it is possible to succeed in Canada, while also remaining true to your own cultural traditions, which are the most ancient on this continent."

Among the inductees to this year's program were several scholars, star athletes and young volunteers, as well as an aspiring pilot, an amateur actress, jingle dress dancers, a science whiz, a medical student, a young Métis leader, an RCMP constable, and an auxiliary member of the RCMP.

Throughout the year, the chosen candidates will be available as motivational speakers, travelling to communities, conferences, events, and school functions across Canada to share their stories with other Aboriginal youth. Posters and trading cards featuring the leaders, are produced and distributed to Aboriginal communities, schools, and friendship centres.

NARMP has recognized a total of 36 Aboriginal youth since NAHO began co-ordinating the program four years ago. For many of the program's past participants, being a role model was a life-altering experience.

"The National Aboriginal Role Model Program changed my life," said Thomas Edwards, a 2004-2005 role model. "Not only was I given the chance to meet youth and share my story, but they inspired me when they shared their stories and made me proud to be a First Nation youth."

A new roster of Aboriginal youth were announced on National Aboriginal Day: June 21, 2007. The 2007-2008 role models are: Suzette Amaya from Gwa'Sala-Nakwaxda'xw Nation, British Columbia; Julie Bull from Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Newfoundland and Labrador; Carissa Copenace

Thomas Edwards

25 years old from Ojibway, Lake Manitoba First Nation
Fields of interest: Education & Theatre
2004-05 Role Model

My students and the youth that I have worked with – both from Winnipeg and from Lake Manitoba First Nation – have contributed to my success. I also have a lot of role models in my family that I look up to in order to stay strong and be successful; people like my Aunty Joyce, Uncle Peter, and my Godparents, Paulette and Jacques Dupont, encourage me, as do organizations like the Festival du Voyageur, who have accepted me into their family. Without these people and support groups in my life, I wouldn't have gotten as far as I did.

I see Aboriginal youth having more of a voice in all aspects of Canadian life. As long as we keep showing them the right road and continue to support them, they will only grow stronger. They need to know that they can be as successful as anyone else. Aboriginal youth today have such a strong voice and I see it only growing stronger as they mature.

from Rainy River First Nation, Ontario; Jessica Dunkley from Vancouver, British Columbia; Jordan Fleury from Brandon, Manitoba; Gloria Kowtak from Whale Cove, Nunavut; Shawn Kuliktana from Kugluktuk, Nunavut; Candice Lys from Fort Smith, Northwest Territories; Anna Nelson from Roseau River Anishinaabe First Nation, Manitoba; Alwyn Piche from La Loche, Saskatchewan; Charlie Tookaluk from Umiujaq, Quebec; and Vanessa Webb from Nain, Newfoundland and Labrador.

A new National Spokesperson was chosen this year to be the ambassador of the role model program. James Makokis is Cree from the Saddle Lake Cree Nation in Alberta. Currently studying medicine at the University of Ottawa, Makokis has a Bachelor of Science in Nutrition and Food Science from the University of Alberta and a Masters of Health Science in Community Nutrition from the University of Toronto. In March 2007, Makokis received the Youth Award from the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation.

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Voices of Aboriginal Youth Today

Keeping Aboriginal Languages Alive for Future Generations

Mary Jane Norris
Senior Research Manager
Research and Analysis Directorate
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada

History was made in Calgary, Alberta on February 3, 2007, when a 13-year-old First Nation girl became the first person to sing "O Canada" in Cree at a National Hockey League game.[1] This exciting occasion comes at a time when Aboriginal children and youth in Canada – at home or in school – are making concerted efforts to learn and speak their traditional languages, and contributing to a growing awareness about Canada's indigenous languages. As this paper argues, these are positive developments that ought to be encouraged, even as Aboriginal languages in Canada continue to face enormous challenges.

Context: Intergenerational Transmission of Aboriginal Languages in Decline

Historically, Aboriginal youth faced considerable barriers in using their languages throughout society in general, but particularly through the prohibition of Aboriginal languages in residential schools.[2] While today's Aboriginal youth may not face the same obstacles as their predecessors, the impacts of those past policies remain, and combine with significant new barriers and challenges in the revitalization and maintenance of traditional languages.

More than previous generations, Aboriginal youth today contend with the prevailing influence of English and French in the media, popular culture, and the market place. Further, demographic and geographic factors can erode the intergenerational transmission of Aboriginal languages: just over 10 percent of Aboriginal children and youth today live in "ideal" conditions for acquiring an Aboriginal mother tongue, that is, living within Aboriginal communities in families where both parents have an Aboriginal mother tongue (Norris, 2007).

Indications are that the intergenerational transmission of Aboriginal languages is in decline among younger generations: analysis of 2001 Census data shows that among people aged 65 and over who identified themselves as Aboriginal, 44 percent reported the ability to speak an Aboriginal language, and 40 percent have an Aboriginal mother tongue. In contrast, only 20 percent of Aboriginal children and youth under the age of 25 were able to speak an Aboriginal language, while just 16 percent had an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue.

Children remain the major source of growth for the Aboriginal mother tongue population in Canada. However, census data show that mother tongue population growth is eroding, notwithstanding relatively high levels of Aboriginal fertility. The ever-diminishing use of Aboriginal languages as "major home languages" reduces the chances of younger people acquiring their traditional language as a mother tongue. For the first time since 1981, the mother tongue population fell, from 208,600 in 1996 to 203,900 in 2001. The proportion of children (aged 0-19) in the Aboriginal mother tongue population fell from 41 percent in 1986 to just 32 percent in 2001 (Norris, 2003; See Figure 1).[3] From 1981 to 2001, the prospects of

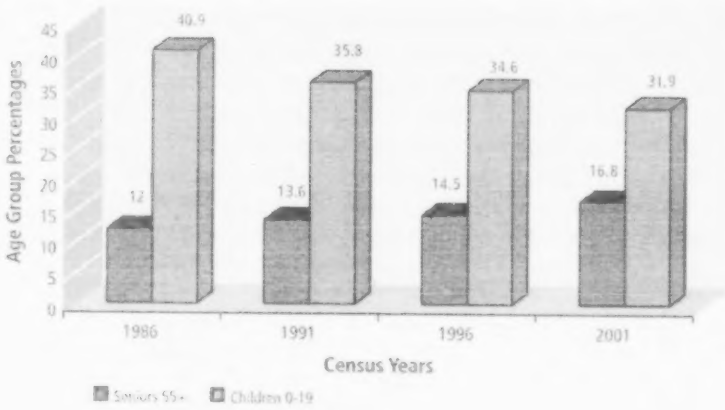
transmitting a language as a mother tongue, as measured by the index of continuity, declined from 76 persons speaking the language at home for every 100 persons who speak it as their mother tongue, to just 61 persons (See Figure 2).[4]

The decline in mother tongue transmission is informed significantly by numerous factors. First and foremost among these factors is home use. Of the 58,000 children (aged 5 to 14 in 1996) with a parent with an Aboriginal mother tongue, over 90 percent had the ability (knowledge) to conduct a conversation in the Aboriginal language of a parent; however, only 47 percent had the parent's Aboriginal mother tongue, while an even smaller share (38%) spoke their Aboriginal language at home.

Aboriginal mother tongue continuity is also linked to the life cycle, and in particular to transitions from youth to adulthood. A cohort analysis of census data showed that the most pronounced decline in home use of Aboriginal languages occurred among female youth from the ages of 20 to 24 in 1981 to ages 35 to 39 in 1996. This is significant given these are the years during which women leave home, enter the labour force, marry, bring up young children, or move to a larger urban environment (Norris, 1998).

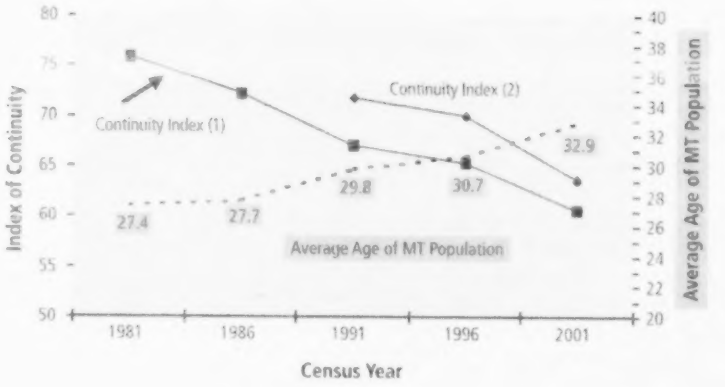
Diminished language continuity is particularly associated with linguistic out-marriage (exogamy). Figure 3 illustrates the strong inverse linear association between language continuity and exogamy. Viable languages with extremely high language continuity

FIGURE 1
Age Composition of Mother Tongue Population: Children and Seniors as Percentage of Total Population with an Aboriginal Mother Tongue, 1986 to 2001



Source: 1986-2001 Censuses, Norris (2003).

FIGURE 2
Aboriginal Languages: Index of Continuity and Average Age of Mother Tongue Population, Canada, 1981 to 2001



Notes:
(1) Based on single responses to language (MT, HL) questions.
(2) Based on single and multiple responses.
Source: 1981-2001 Censuses, Norris (2003).

FIGURE 3

Aboriginal Language Continuity and Percentage of Children in Exogamous Marriages, by Aboriginal Language of Parent(s), Canada, 1996

Source: 1996 Census, Norris and MacCon (2003).
Note: Since this is a Census-based article, we have chosen to use Census-based terminology and style in the naming of the languages.

(80% plus), such as Attikamek, Montagnais-Naskapi, and Inuktitut, are characterized by low exogamy rates (less than 20%); while endangered languages, such as Haida, Tlingit, and Kutenai, display extremely low continuity levels of 20 percent or less and extremely high exogamy rates (averaging 90%). The largest First Nation language, Cree, has continuity and exogamy rates of about 70 and 30 percent respectively (Norris, 2003).

Outcomes are also associated with location: among linguistically endogamous families, proportions of children that have an Aboriginal mother tongue are highest on reserves (68%) and other rural communities (77%), but drop to just 41 percent in large cities (Norris, 2003).

Finally, differences in the outcomes of Aboriginal youth mirror the diversity and viability of the different languages, which vary significantly in their states, trends, and outlook.[5] Figure 4 illustrates the strong inverse linear association between language continuity and average age of the mother tongue population. Viable languages like Attikamek, Inuktitut, and Dene are characterized by relatively young mother tongue populations and high continuity, while endangered languages like Haida, Kutenai, and Tlingit typically have older mother tongue populations combined with very low continuity indexes, patterns that persisted from the 1996 Census to 2001 Census (Norris, 2003, 2007).

Overall, trends indicate that many Aboriginal languages – even larger ones – will be confronted with declining mother tongue continuity in future generations. In 2001, just 13 percent of the Aboriginal population reported using an Aboriginal language "most often" in the home, and five percent on a "regular" basis (Norris and Jantzen, 2003). In the case of already-endangered languages, extinction could be only a generation away, without revitalization efforts, while languages currently considered viable may experience growing problems of continuity among younger generations.

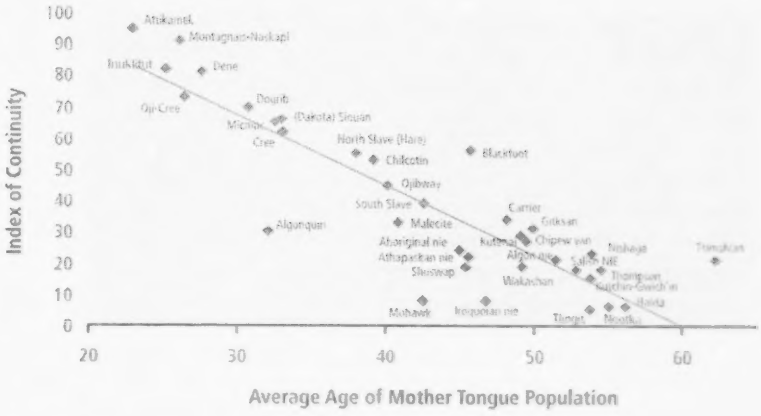
Second-Language Acquisition: Counterbalance to Mother Tongue Decline

Aboriginal youth are considerably less likely than their elders to speak an Aboriginal language and, among those who do, it appears that the likelihood of acquiring their language as a second language is increasing (Norris, 2003, 2007). Figure 5 shows that while Aboriginal children and youth under age 25 represent 38 percent of Aboriginal mother tongue speakers, they make up a larger share of second-language speakers, about 45 percent. This is in contrast to the distribution of mother tongue and second language speakers among those aged 45 years and older (Figure 5) (Norris, 2007). The index of second-language acquisition[6] indicates that for every 100 Aboriginal youths in Canada who have an Aboriginal mother tongue,

there are more – 121 – who can speak an Aboriginal language, implying that some youth must have learned their language as a second language, which is higher than the corresponding index of 107 for speakers of age 65 years or more. Among all Aboriginal language speakers, the second-language index rose from 117 in 1996 to 120 in 2001.

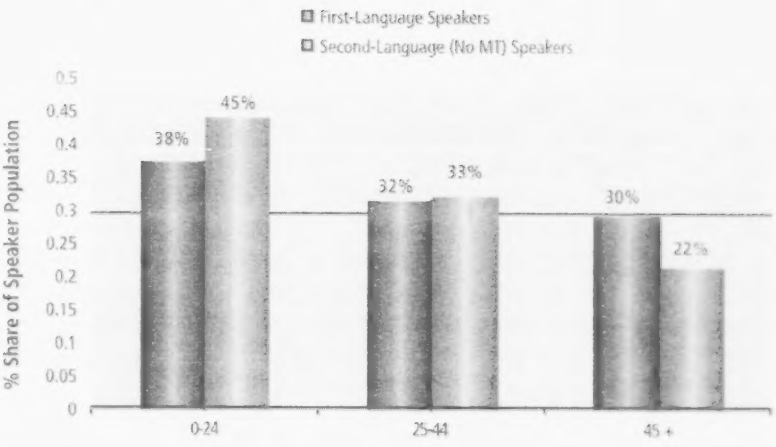
Second-language acquisition is increasingly important at the community level as well, particularly as mother tongue populations age out of the childbearing years. Between 1996 and 2001 the proportion of comparable communities where most Aboriginal speakers had learned the language as their mother tongue dropped from two thirds to less than half, whereas the proportion of communities where most speakers had acquired it as their second language doubled from 8.5 to 17 percent. Fully one third of communities enumerated in 2001 could be classified as being in transition from a mother tongue population to a second-language population (Norris, 2006). The impact of second-language acquisition is most pronounced outside Aboriginal communities/settlements and in urban areas: 165 off-reserve Registered Indian children aged 10 to 14 are able to speak a First Nation language for every 100 children with a First Nation mother tongue, compared to a corresponding index of only 115 on reserves, suggesting that young people living outside Aboriginal communities are significantly more likely to acquire their traditional language as a second language compared to those on reserves (Norris and Jantzen, 2002).

FIGURE 4
Index of Language Continuity by Average Age of Mother Tongue Population, Canada, 2001



Source: 2001 Census, author's calculations.

FIGURE 5
Distribution of First and Second Language Speakers by Age Groups, Canada, 2001



Source: 2001 Census, Norris (2007) (CST).

Growth of second-language acquisition is important to the long-term viability of languages, given the observed declines in mother tongue populations. The Tlingit language family, for example, has one of the oldest mother tongue populations, averaging close to 54 years, but the index of second-language acquisition is 219, and the average age of all speakers is 41 years, suggesting that younger generations are more likely to learn Tlingit as a second language (Table 1).

The process of learning an Aboriginal language may also contribute to increased self-esteem of youth and community well-being, as well as cultural continuity.

Among some endangered languages, there appears to be a strong tendency among parents to ensure that their children have at least some knowledge of their ancestral language, even if transmission as a mother tongue is weak (Norris and MacCon, 2003). Demographically, second-language transmission is increasingly a necessary response for endangered languages, reflecting two phenomena: many mother tongue populations are aging beyond childbearing, and for most children the ideal family and community conditions for mother tongue transmission are becoming more the exception than the norm. Figure 6 shows how young second-language speakers make up an increasingly important segment of the populations of endangered languages.

From 1996 to 2001, the smaller Salish languages experienced a five percent drop in mother tongue population while simultaneously posting an impressive 17 percent increase in the total number of speakers (Norris, 2007).

Outlook: Youth Keeping Aboriginal Languages Alive for Generations to Come

The language outcomes of today's Aboriginal youth have significant implications for the future prospects of Canada's Aboriginal languages, particularly endangered languages. As future parents, today's youth will become responsible for the survival of their languages, cultures, and traditions and, ultimately, the identity of their descendants.

There are encouraging signs from the rise in second-language acquisition, particularly where it appears the speaker population may be growing due to an influx of youth. That suggests a strong desire among young people to learn their traditional languages, accompanied by support and opportunities for learning. These implications are consistent with findings of the 2001 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS) which showed that speaking an Aboriginal language is important to Aboriginal people of all ages, including youth, parents, and adults both within and outside Aboriginal communities. While APS results reinforce the importance of parents and home use of languages, they also point to other important sources of learning for children including their extended family of aunts, uncles, grandparents, and other persons, teachers in schools, and the community itself (Norris, 2004). Even in the case of relatively strong languages like Inuktitut, for example, Inuit youth who say they do not want to lose their ability to speak

Table 1 (on the following page)

Notes:

1. The indicators – index of continuity, index of ability, and average age of mother tongue and home language – are based on single and multiple responses (of mother tongue and home language) combined.
2. The viability "status" of the individual languages is based on a classification from M. Dale Kinkade's "The Decline of Native Languages in Canada" in *Endangered Languages* (1991).
3. Four reserves in Manitoba had changes in reporting patterns for Cree, Oji-Cree, and Ojibway between 1996 and 2001.
4. Due to changes in coding procedures between 1996 and 2001, North and South Slave are not directly comparable between the two censuses.
5. Data for the Iroquoian family are not particularly representative due to the significant impact of incomplete enumeration of reserves for this language family. Other languages, such as those in the Algonquian family, may be affected to some extent by incomplete enumeration.

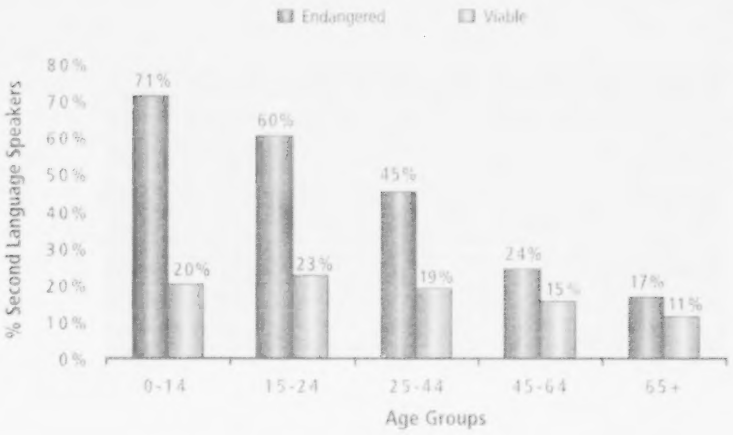
Source: 1996 and 2001 Census custom tabulations. Adapted from Norris (1998, 2007).

TABLE 1

Selected Youth – Related Indicators[1] for Aboriginal Language Vitality[2] by Viable and Endangered Languages, Canada 2001 Census

	2001	2001	2001	Selected Youth – Related Indicators: 1996 % of Children in, with Ability, Mother Tongue, Home Language; and 2001 Average Age of Populations						
Aboriginal Languages	Total Aboriginal Mother Tongue Population	Continuity Index	Ability / Second Language Index	Knowledge/ Ability to Speak		Mother Tongue		Home Language		Viability Status of Language, 1996, 2001
				% of Children	Avg. Age	% of Children	Avg. Age	% of Children	Avg. Age	
Total Aboriginal Languages	**203,300**	**64**	**120**	**93.7**	**32.1**	**47.1**	**32.9**	**37.6**	**29.7**	**viable and endangered**
				%		%		%		
Algonquian Family	**142,090**	**62**	**120**	**94.5**	**32.5**	**43.8**	**33.3**	**34.0**	**30.6**	**mostly viable**
Cree[3]	80,075	62	121	96.7	32.4	45.4	33.0	35.7	30.8	viable large
Ojibway[3]	23,520	45	130	87.1	38.0	24.9	40.1	16.0	37.3	viable large
Montagnais-Naskapi	9,890	91	106	98.5	26.0	87.3	26.1	81.1	25.6	viable small
Micmac	7,650	65	117	96.0	31.3	49.3	32.5	30.9	31.7	viable small
Oji-Cree[2]	9,875	73	106	95.9	26.2	58.0	26.4	43.7	25.9	viable small
Attikamek	4,725	95	105	96.9	22.7	93.3	22.9	91.8	22.3	viable small
Blackfoot	3,025	56	149	90.7	40.8	7.9	45.7	4.6	46.0	viable/uncertain
Algonquin	1,860	30	130	89.5	30.2	56.8	32.1	17.9	36.3	viable/uncertain
Malecite	825	33	133	86.8	40.6	2.6	40.8	7.9	44.7	viable/uncertain
Algonquian NIE	645	19	154	n/a	44.1	n/a	49.1	n/a	48.8	uncertain
Inuktitut Family	**29,695**	**82**	**110**	**98.1**	**25.0**	**79.0**	**25.1**	**69.9**	**24.2**	**viable large**
Athapaskan Family	**18,530**	**63**	**121**	**90.9**	**33.1**	**41.4**	**34.3**	**33.2**	**31.0**	**mostly viable**
Dene	9,595	81	110	94.4	27.2	66.8	27.6	58.1	26.2	viable small
South Slave[4]	1,460	39	151	93.0	37.8	28.7	42.5	18.9	44.3	viable/uncertain
Dogrib	1,925	70	119	96.7	29.3	50.0	30.7	32.8	31.3	viable small
Carrier	1,445	34	142	88.7	43.4	7.5	48.1	4.7	49.9	viable/uncertain
Chipewyan	655	27	144	79.8	45.8	11.0	49.4	7.3	51.1	viable/uncertain
Athapaskan, NIE	1,210	22	140	80.7	41.5	12.3	45.6	7.0	50.3	uncertain
Chilcotin	1,010	53	113	90.0	37.3	8.0	39.1	4.0	43.3	viable small
Kutchin-Gwich'in (Loucheux)	365	15	137	74.4	50.4	11.6	53.7	4.7	61.8	endangered
North Slave (Hare)[4]	865	55	119	n/a	35.7	n/a	38.0	n/a	38.3	endangered
(Dakota) Siouan Family	4,310	66	115	83.1	31.9	38.6	32.9	33.1	28.9	viable small
Salish Family	**3,210**	**20**	**156**	**67.3**	**41.5**	**8.9**	**50.0**	**1.6**	**46.9**	**endangered**
Salish NIE	1,920	21	157		41.2		51.4		47.8	endangered
Shuswap	815	19	154		39.4		45.3		41.0	endangered
Thompson	475	18	151		46.5		52.8		52.7	endangered
Tsimshian Family	**2,030**	**26**	**135**	**89.8**	**48.8**	**10.2**	**53.7**	**0.8**	**55.6**	**mostly endangered**
Gitksan	1,000	31	132		45.7		49.9		52.2	viable/uncertain
Nishga	600	23	153		46.9		53.9		55.4	endangered
Tsimshian	430	21	117		61.4		62.2		67.9	endangered
Wakashan Family	**1,445**	**14**	**123**	**52.5**	**48.8**	**3.4**	**54.6**	**0.0**	**50.0**	**endangered**
Wakashan	980	18	130		48.7		54.5		48.6	endangered
Nootka	465	6	109		49.1		55.0		58.3	endangered
Iroquoian Family[5]	**670**	**8**	**150**	**43.8**	**37.7**	**31.3**	**44.0**	**0.0**	**39.9**	**uncertain**
Mohawk	425	8	178		35.4		42.5		34.0	uncertain
Iroquoian NIE	245	8	102		45.0		46.7		50.1	uncertain
Haida Isolate	**165**	**6**	**164**	**64.7 (all 3 isolates)**	**48.8**	**23.5 (all 3 isolates)**	**56.2**	**0.0 (all 3 isolates)**	**50.2**	**endangered**
Kutenai Isolate	**170**	**29**	**129**		**41.5**		**49.0**		**42.9**	**endangered**
Tlingit Isolate	**105**	**5**	**219**		**41.4**		**53.7**		**58.9**	**endangered**
Aboriginal Lang NIE	**880**	**24**	**159**	**n/a**	**44.1**	**n/a**	**44.9**	**n/a**	**44.9**	**endangered**

FIGURE 6
Second Language Speakers as Percentage of Population Speaking Endangered and Viable Languages, Canada, 2001



Source: 2001 Census, Norris (2007) (CST).

Inuktitut well also identify a need for support through family, community, and education, with opportunities to learn, hear, and use it (Tulloch, 2005).

Yet for these encouraging trends to continue, today's youth will have to overcome significant challenges in their role as future parents charged with passing on the language to the next generation. For those youth who are first-language speakers of more viable languages, the challenge lies in maintaining their mother tongue as a home language as they enter their family formation years, to ensure their language becomes the mother tongue of their children.

The crucial question for Aboriginal youth who are second-language speakers, especially in relation to the revitalization of endangered languages, concerns the extent to which they, as parents, will be able to transmit knowledge of their language to their own children. They may face particular difficulties depending on their degree of fluency and the day-to-day use of the language within home and community. If home use as a "major language" erodes, then so do the chances of it being passed on as the mother tongue of their children. However, it may be that even speaking an Aboriginal language on a regular basis could contribute to continuity to some extent (Norris and Jantzen, 2003), or at least provide children with knowledge of their ancestral tongue as a second language. Finally, for some of the most endangered languages the prospect of aging second-language speakers cannot be ignored: "high shares of second language speakers do not always imply younger speakers. For example, in 2001 virtually none of the 500 people who could speak Tsimshian were under the age of 25, even though 32% were second language speakers" (Norris, 2007:24).

Ultimately, trends suggesting renewed interest in the vitality of Aboriginal languages among Aboriginal youth are to be celebrated. The ability to speak the language of their ancestors affords youth opportunities to communicate with older family members in their traditional language, which contributes to maintenance of traditional cultures. The process of learning an Aboriginal language may also contribute to increased self-esteem of youth and community well-being, as well as cultural continuity (Chandler, 2006; Canadian Heritage, 2005).

While second-language acquisition by today's youth arises out of a growing demographic necessity, it also reflects increasing interest and opportunities for renewal. Only time will tell whether this phenomenon will have fostered new generations of speakers, or have been a harbinger of further decline.

The importance of youth helping to keep their Aboriginal languages alive is best captured by the words of the parents of the young Cree teenager who sang Canada's national anthem in her family's traditional language in February, 2007: "It's good news for Aboriginal people...when our daughter sings the Cree version of 'O Canada' to the Elders, they feel goose bumps. It really feels like you just said a prayer to the creator."[7]

Notes

1 Sources online as of June 8, 2007: <www.cbc.ca/canada/edmonton/story/2007/02/01/ocanada-cree.html>

<www.cbc.ca/canada/story/2007/02/03/cree-hockey.html>

<www.cbc.ca/clips/mov/jiwan-singer070203.mov>

<www.cbc.ca/radioshows/AS_IT_HAPPENS/20070205.shtml>.

2 Source: <www.schoolnet.ca/aboriginal/issues/schools-e.html>.

3 Some caution is required in comparing Aboriginal populations between censuses, due to ethnic mobility and fluidity in self-identity among the Aboriginal population. Also, intercensal comparisons of Aboriginal language data can be affected by differentials in coverage, incomplete enumeration, reporting, content, and questions, which have been controlled for where feasible.

4 The prospects of transmitting a language as a mother tongue can be assessed using an index of continuity (HL/MT), which measures the number of people who speak the language at home for every 100 persons who speak it as their mother tongue. A ratio less than 100 indicates some decline in the strength of the language (i.e., for every 100 people with an Aboriginal mother tongue, there are fewer than 100 in the overall population who use it at home). The lower the score, the greater the decline or erosion of the language.

5 For more discussion on viable and endangered languages, see Kinkade (1991) and Norris (1998, 2005, 2006, 2007). Note that Kinkade classified Aboriginal languages in Canada into five language states: already extinct, near extinction, endangered, viable but with a small population base, and viable with a large population.

Endangered languages are spoken by enough people to make survival a possibility, tending to have small populations, older speakers, and lower rates of language transmission or continuity, with many located in British Columbia.

Viable but small languages have generally more than 1,000 speakers and are spoken in isolated or well organized communities with strong self-awareness. They can be considered viable if their continuity is high and they have relatively young speakers (e.g., Attikamek and Dene).

Viable large languages have a large enough population base that long-term survival is likely assured. This includes Cree, Inuktitut, and Ojibway.

Census data are available for viable and endangered languages, but are not available separately for languages near extinction owing to the small number of speakers.

6 An index of second-language acquisition or ability (KN/MT) compares the number of people who report being able to speak the language with the number who have that Aboriginal language as a mother tongue. If for every 100 people with a specific Aboriginal mother tongue, more than 100 persons in the overall population are able to speak that language, then some learned it as a second language either in school or later in life. This may suggest some degree of language revival. Note that separate indexes of second language acquisition have been calculated for the Aboriginal identity and the total population (regardless of identity).

7 <www.cbc.ca/canada/edmonton/story/2007/02/01/ocanada-cree.html>. Online as of June 8, 2007.

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Cultural Continuity as a Protective Factor against Suicide in First Nations Youth

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The question of whether, in some legendary and less trammeled past, the tragedy of suicide among Canada's Aboriginal youth was once less commonplace than it is today is, perhaps, unanswerable. What is not open to serious doubt is the accumulating body of contemporary evidence (evidence forcibly brought to public attention by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples) demonstrating that, at least among certain of Canada's First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, youth suicide rates have reached calamitous proportions – rates said to be higher than those of any culturally identifiable group in the world (Kirmayer, 1994). The remarkable outpouring of concern over such suicides that followed in the wake of the Royal Commission resulted in scores of public gatherings, funded research initiatives, government reports, and scholarly publications. Although this literature is much too large to be summarized here, it is, nevertheless, possible to extract from all of these efforts a few summary conclusions to guide future research and practice.

The most obvious of these conclusions is that youth suicide is so devastating to families and friends and communities there is not (and should not be) any holding back on the range of well-intended impulses to ameliorate and prevent such tragedies. In our collective rush to be helpful, however, such preventive efforts often seriously outstrip available knowledge concerning the actual causes of suicide. To correct this imbalance, a greater proportion of our collective energies and resources needs to be devoted to better understanding the circumstances responsible for the high rates of youth suicide that characterize some Aboriginal communities, but not others.

A second general conclusion to emerge from the available research literature is that the most promising unit of analysis is not individual youth, but rather the whole cultural communities in which they live (Lester and Yang, 2006). This follows because given that suicide is statistically rare (even when it is epidemic), it is almost never possible to predict who will or won't take their own life (Rosen, 1954); and because, although changing the subterranean thoughts and feelings of suicidal individuals remains a poorly understood art, what is required to address the crying needs of whole Aboriginal communities that exhibit extraordinarily high rates of youth suicide, is often painfully obvious.

Together, these rules of thumb underscore the importance of searching out factors associated with community-level variability in youth suicide rates and have dictated the course of the decade-long program of research to be summarized in the balance of this account.

Cultural Continuity and Suicide in First Nations Youth

Because they are otherwise remarkably robust, death among Aboriginal youth often proves to be self-appointed. After "accidents," suicide is the major killer of young Aboriginal persons (Statistics Canada, 2001). In British Columbia, for example, where the data summarized here were collected, First Nations

youth take their own lives at rates variously estimated to be between 5 and 20 times higher than that of the non-Aboriginal population (Chandler et al., 2003). Such summary statistics, while technically correct, need to be understood as "actuarial fictions" that regularly hide more than they reveal. Indiscriminately painting the whole of Canada's (or British Columbia's) First Nations with the same broad brush not only obscures the real cultural diversity that marks the lives of Aboriginal peoples, but also mistakenly substitutes the banner headline of "Aboriginality" for a much larger set of factors that could better explain the variability in suicide rates across First Nations communities.

Far from being uniformly distributed, the rate of Aboriginal youth suicide across the 200 bands in British Columbia actually varies in wildly saw-toothed ways (Chandler and Lalonde, 1998; Chandler et al., 2003). This has set an agenda for more than a decade of our own research with a focus on why some Aboriginal communities experience epidemic rates of youth suicide, while such deaths are largely unknown in others.

A Developmental Back-Story

The research being reported began with the wonderment of how it could possibly happen that, with all of life's potential, young people could so frequently take steps to end their own lives. Our earliest research efforts showed that suicide risk is related to a set of common pitfalls that mark the usual course of identity development (Chandler and Ball, 1990). Failures in constructing a sense of ownership of one's personal and collective past, and some commitment to one's own future prospects, were associated with a dramatically heightened risk of suicide. In the absence of a sense of personal and cultural continuity, our ongoing studies show that life is easily cheapened, and the possibility of suicide becomes a live option.

FIGURE 1
Youth Suicide Rate by Band (1987-2000)

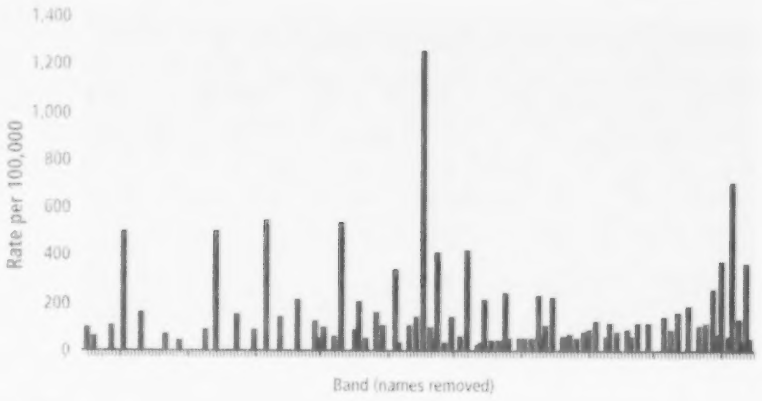
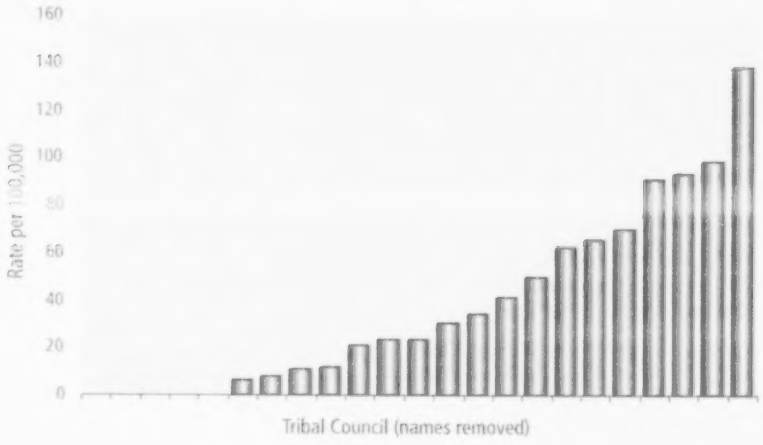


FIGURE 2
Youth Suicide Rate by Tribal Council (1987-2000)



From Normative to Risk and Resilience Research

However hazardous growing up may otherwise be, such risks are necessarily magnified when the cultural backcloth against which development naturally unfolds is unravelled by social-cultural adversities. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the identity struggles of young Aboriginal persons who must construct a sense of self-hood out of the remnants of a way of life that harsh colonial practices have systematically overthrown. In the best circumstances, one's culture can be counted on to provide young people with a backstop – some measure of sameness while outgrowing childish ways. If, instead, one's culture has been marginalized (because of colonization or decolonization or globalization), the trustworthy ways of one's community are criminalized, legislated out of existence, or otherwise assimilated beyond easy recognition, then the path for those transiting toward maturity becomes much more difficult. This is the fate, we argue, of many Indigenous youth around the world. Their culture of origin no longer computes, and their paradise has been turned into a parking lot. The predictable consequence of such personal and cultural losses is often disillusionment, lassitude, substance abuse, self-injury and, most dramatically, self-appointed death at an early age.

The predictable consequence of such personal and cultural losses is often disillusionment, lassitude, substance abuse, self-injury and, most dramatically, self-appointed death at an early age.

From Self- to Cultural Continuity

If, as argued, cultural continuity forms a critical backstop to the routine foibles of identity formation, then it similarly follows that community-level rates of youth suicide should also vary as a function of the degree to which particular Aboriginal communities find themselves bereft of meaningful connections to their traditional past, and otherwise cut off from local control of their own future prospects. More particularly, two testable claims flow from these expectations.

The first is that, because different Aboriginal communities have differently weathered their typically negative contacts with the non-Aboriginal world, their collective responses to such adversities should be equally variable. With particular reference to the problem of youth suicide, it ought to follow that, when viewed at the level of British Columbia's almost 200 separate bands, the rate at which youth suicides occur should also vary among communities.

To the degree that the above comments hold any promise for helping us better understand why the burden of suicide falls so disproportionately on the young, and especially on some (but not other) young Aboriginal persons, then a network of related hypotheses suggest themselves.

Second, and because communities have met with varying levels of success in rehabilitating their culture, it should also happen that suicide rates will be lower in those bands that have achieved a greater measure of success in reconnecting to their traditional past, and in building ties to some shared future.

Both of these hypotheses have now been tested in two separate waves of data collection that cover the years 1987 to 2000. In both studies, every confirmed Aboriginal suicide in British Columbia was classified by band of origin and each of the province's 197 recognized bands were dichotomously coded in terms of the presence or absence of six and later eight "cultural continuity" factors, described in more detail below. Summary findings from these two data sets are reported in the paragraphs that follow.

Results

Hypothesis One: Province-Wide Youth Suicide Rates as an Actuarial Fiction

The observed suicide rate for the First Nations population of British Columbia during the period 1987 to 2000 was more than double the provincial average. If, against reason, suicide rates were unrelated to band membership, then tabulating the suicide rate for each band would have resulted in a more or less rectangular distribution. As shown in Figure 1, however, something much closer to the opposite is true. What this saw-toothed picture makes clear is that many Aboriginal communities in British Columbia suffered no youth (aged 15 to 24 years) suicides during

the 1987 to 2000 period, while, for others, the rate was many times higher than the provincial average. Figure 2 arrays youth suicide rates by tribal council.

What these data show is that nearly 90 percent of suicides occur in less than 10 percent of communities, and that in more than half of all bands, and 20 percent of tribal councils, youth suicide is effectively unknown. Clearly, the "epidemic" of youth suicides regularly reported in the popular press is not a "First Nations" epidemic, but a tragedy suffered by some communities and not others.

Hypothesis Two: Cultural Continuity As a Hedge against Aboriginal Youth Suicide

Hypothesis Two was predicated on the assumption that distinctive cultural groups, like individual selves, are constituted by identity-preserving practices that forge links to a common past and future. On this prospect, it was anticipated that First Nations communities bereft of such culture-sustaining ties would be at special risk for suicide, while those that had achieved greater measures of success in preserving cultural connections would be better shielded from the "slings and arrows" that regularly cost young Aboriginal persons appropriate levels of care and concern for their own future well-being.

Two waves of data, meant to test this hypothesis, were again collected. During the first study period (1987 to 1992), available records were carefully sifted to locate community-level variables descriptive of common efforts to preserve links to a shared cultural past, and to forge a common cultural future. Six such markers of cultural continuity were initially identified, including indications of whether communities had achieved a measure of self-government, litigated for Aboriginal title to traditional lands, accomplished a measure of local control over health, education and policing services, and created community facilities for the preservation of culture. Summing across these dichotomized measures yielded an overall cultural continuity index ranging from 0 to 6.

The average youth suicide rates for all bands scoring at one or the other

FIGURE 3
Youth Suicide Rate by Number of Factors Present (1987-1992)

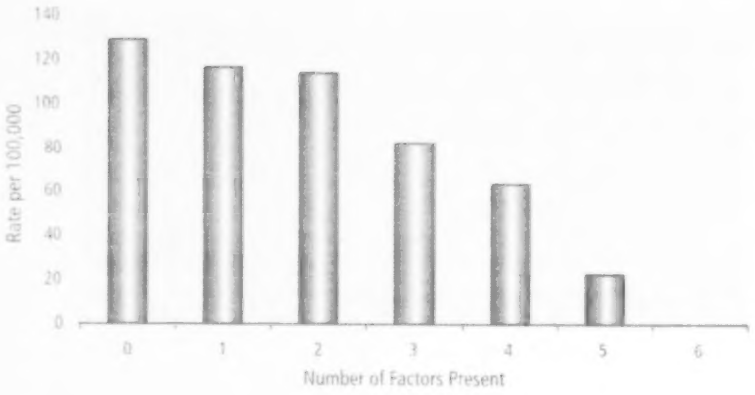
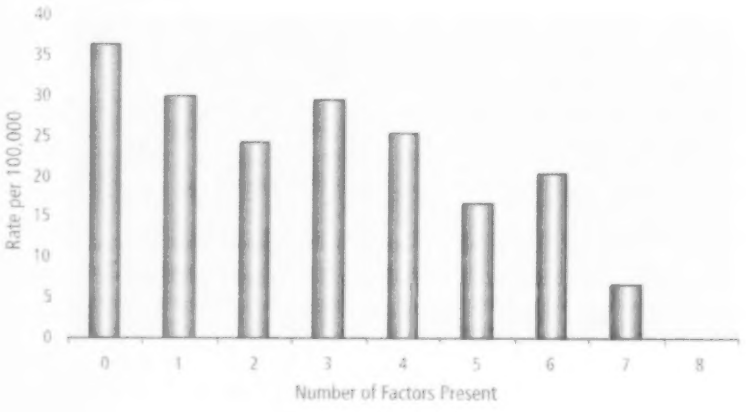


FIGURE 4
Total Suicide Rate by Number of Factors Present (1993-2000)



of these six cultural continuity levels are detailed in Figure 3. Bands that evidenced all of these cultural continuity factors had *no* youth suicides during our first study window. By contrast, bands that evidenced none of these "protective" factors suffered youth suicide rates many times the national average.

The addition of measures of local control over child welfare services, and the involvement of women in band governance (band councils composed of more than 50 percent women) were also shown to evidence dramatically lower youth suicide rates. As shown in Figure 4, bands characterized by all eight of these cultural continuity factors show zero-order levels of both youth and adult suicide, while those characterized by none of these factors suffer epidemic suicide levels.

Conclusion

Taken altogether, this extended program of research strongly supports two major conclusions. First, generic claims about youth suicide rates for the whole of any Aboriginal world are, at best, actuarial fictions that obscure critical community-by-community differences in the frequency of such deaths. Second, individual and cultural continuity are strongly linked, such that First Nations communities that succeed in taking steps to preserve their heritage culture and work to control their own destinies are dramatically more successful in insulating their youth against the risks of suicide.

Full references are available in the online version of this issue. It can be accessed by visiting the PRI web site at <www.policyresearch.gc.ca>

Uqausirtinnik Annirusunniq
Longing for Our Language

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In 1999, I travelled to Iqaluit, Nunavut. I had set out to identify the foundation in place for the promotion of the Inuit language – one of the goals of the fledgling territory (cf. Nunavut Implementation Commission, 1996; Nunavut, 1999). Common wisdom in language policy and planning says that efforts must be grounded in the desires and capacity of the population (cf. Burnaby and Reyhner, 2002; Fishman, 1991; Hinton and Hale, 2001; Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997). I determined to learn what Inuit aspired for their language, and why. In my first interview, the Inuit policy maker quoted above (A1) provided insight into a pressing motivation for ensuring all Inuit have access to knowing, learning, and using their ancestral language: the language brings and binds community members together. Without it, some Inuit feel disconnected; they miss acceptance and the opportunity to participate fully in their community. Subsequent interviews with 40 Inuit youth, reinforced by 130 closed questionnaires, and 16 months of participant observation in Baffin communities (and later by interviews in other regions and with different age groups) support the policy-maker's intuition. While most youth in Nunavut have knowledge of and opportunities to use the Inuit language, these are generally insufficient to meet their internal standards and interactional goals (an idea developed in Tulloch, 2004). The motivations of youth for practising and developing the Inuit language are practical and pragmatic. Their experience of language shift[1] is linked with tangible gaps in communication, community integration, and participation.

(A1) I think that's become more and more apparent. There are a lot of Inuit beneficiaries who do not speak Inuktitut.... It's new, they are Inuit but they don't speak it.... For the adults, it's hard...to communicate...the communication becomes a problem. There's not enough...they're not communicating with their elders or their extended family members who are older.... There's no interaction. The same goes in the workplace, when they don't speak Inuktitut, even if they understand it, then they're missing out on something that connects you to the social structure as well as culture.... They get discouraged and feel sometimes like they're not really part of that, unfortunately.... Social acceptance... we all want to belong to something. And I think that's where sometimes there is a bit of a friction. Not a friction, but, discontent.

The promotion is very good, I think.... You've got to keep using the language to keep it strong. You have to speak it and practise it. For the people that were sort of drawing away from that, I hope that allows them to come back into the ring.... Bring back their pride of who they are and where they come from. And go back into...the social net.

Loss

The loss of indigenous languages across Canada is well documented (e.g., Standing Committee for Aboriginal Affairs, 1990; RCAP, 1996; Norris, 2006). Regions, communities, and families experienced a shift to varying

degrees, with youth generally reporting weaker indigenous language skills than their parents.[2] The loss is linked to intensive contact with non-indigenous populations where Inuit, like other indigenous groups, were pressured to adopt the dominant language and culture. Families and communities were disrupted as children attended residential schools, sometimes returning unable, or unwilling, to speak their parents' language (cf. RCAP, 1996; Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005).[3] Memories of forced assimilation and enacted ascendancy by non-Inuit linger in the minds of middle-aged Inuit parents and grandparents.[4] Some favoured English in the home, mistakenly believing that transmitting the Inuit language would disadvantage their children. Most aspire now to pass on the Inuit language to their children before or alongside their acquisition of English, but the subtle imposition of the dominant language continues.[5] Stable bilingualism is the goal, but not the current reality.

Desire

The need and desire to maintain indigenous languages is often publicly articulated on the basis of the languages' inherent value. Languages are emblems of a distinct identity, coffers of a unique culture, and vehicles of valued traditions. While such motivations are salient among youth, focusing on them risks suggesting that the importance of the language is *only* symbolic. Interviews with Inuit youth reveal that their concern when the language is lost and their joy when it is strong are based on what they concretely and tangibly *do* with the language. The Inuit language is a privileged tool for self-expression, as well as for family and community bonding, co-operation, and advancement. Breakdowns in language competence are linked to interruptions in the social network. The reverse is also true: advanced (or advancing) competence seems linked to increasing opportunities for community engagement. The pragmatic focus of youth shines through in the following vignettes from three young Inuit, who tell what their proficiency (strong, weak, or improving) has meant to them as individuals and community members.[6]

(D4) I was brought up with my grandparents. My grandparents are born and raised in the North, out on the land and that's the language they know.... At home, in the family, it's Inuktitut. Communication just wouldn't be the same [if I tried to use English]. I'd just see my grandparents with a really confused look on their face, or disgusted, in a way. For them, it's just not being respectful. Some people just don't have exceptions to that.... I was brought up to speak Inuktitut, because it's in our lives, it's our world of communicating; it's our way of understanding each other, because English is to everyone their second language. We have different ways of communicating, we have different ways of understanding, and just being able to say I'm Inuk and I am proud to be Inuk when I speak Inuktitut. To be able to have the knowledge of our ancestors, carrying on the traditions.... I'm a senior drum dancer. A lot of people when they look at tradition it's singing, drumming, how they dealt with people, but Inuktitut to me is also one of those things....

In Inuktitut being able to go to an elder, and ask questions and just sit there and talk. You have more opportunities if you know both languages. You are able to get more information out to more people than you would just in English. Not leaving anyone out.

Integration

While many Inuit youth speak the Inuit language competently, this young woman (D4) exudes uncommon confidence in her linguistic and cultural abilities. Her aptitude, like those with similar skills, is linked to time spent with older family members and engaged in other, traditional forms of self-expression. Being able to interact in the Inuit language enables youth to show respect, conform to community norms, and demonstrate pride in belonging to the Inuit community. Choosing the Inuit language or English, as appropriate, facilitates communication: Inuktitut is the Inuit "way of understanding each other," the language of the Elders, a language that "leaves no one out." These themes of the Inuit language as a privileged tool for community participation are prevalent in interviews with Inuit youth.

Separation

Sometimes, the effects of the practical value of Inuktitut are heartbreaking. Those who cannot speak and understand it poignantly express how the communicative potential of

Inuktitut becomes a source of tears and separation, not pleasure and integration (as described above). Without the Inuit language, Inuit youth feel hindered from learning from older Inuit, acquiring traditional skills and talking about the way things used to be or even better understanding Inuit perspectives. Youth, like the woman quoted below (D3), feel held back in intimately relating to their parents or assuming their membership in the Inuit community. The Inuit language is more than an abstract symbol; it is a concrete necessity for taking hold of the life one desires.

(D3) I don't exactly remember what my teacher told me, I was just told not to speak that language anymore so I told my mom the exact same thing and it hurt her feelings very much, so she just stopped. And my dad stopped speaking to me, Inuktitut to me. So I never spoke it since.... I guess it changed my relationship with my mom and dad; just not relating to one another, deeply as Inuks. They don't speak to me about their experiences in Inuktitut of being out on the land, or just day-to-day things from their perspective because their first language is Inuktitut and not English.... I've lost being able to communicate comfortably with other Inuit, like my friends' parents. I can't go to my dad's friends' house and speak with their wives and learn how to sew and learn what they thought was important, of their experiences of how they grew up. When I'm at the store and I see an elderly lady who looks like she wants to speak to me, I just sort of smile at her and keep walking, because I know I won't be able to understand her.

Restoration

The woman quoted above has since begun to regain her parents' language, and then transmit what she does know to her children. Others experiencing loss have made similar efforts. Their motivation in regaining the language is *communicative*: they want to be able to understand when people speak in Inuktitut, and to address others in the language expected. The means of reacquisition are *interactional*: they are based on visiting, being around Inuktitut speakers, spending time in communities where the language is more vital and taking opportunities to speak Inuktitut. The final youth quoted on the following page (D13) shows the challenge of bilingualism, motivation for balancing two languages, and hope for change.

Responsibility

Youth assume responsibility for maintaining or regaining their language, but they need help from family, community, organizations, and governments. The youths' comments about why they need the Inuit language do not allow policy makers to dismiss indigenous languages as a luxury in an English-dominated world. The languages are not a luxury any more than are communicating with one's parents and grandparents, knowing where one comes from, and being able to gain the kind of education one values (i.e., knowledge of traditional practices and perspectives). If language planning is based on the needs, capacities, and desires of the speakers, initiatives to support language development for Inuit youth can tie into those expressed above in the following ways:

1. Validate the struggle. Recognize the value of the language. Acknowledge one's role (individual or institutional) in its maintenance or loss.
2. Restore interaction. Facilitate and fund programs that emphasize interaction (especially intergenerational) and community integration, for example, through mentoring partnerships and learning circles.[7]
3. Intervention must also support ongoing learning and use by neutralizing factors leading to loss, for example better integrating Inuit language, values, and lived realities in northern schools.[8]

Conclusion

For many Inuit youth, the ancestral language is a source of pleasure, of connection, of belonging. But for others, and increasingly so as fewer youth are proficient speakers, the inability to correspond to community norms and to communicate freely with Elders and parents contributes to feelings of alienation and disinheritance. Helping youth to enhance their abilities in the Inuit language also helps them to interact more freely within their communities and to feel, as the first woman I spoke to in Iqaluit suggested, like they're "a part of it," "social acceptance," "a sense of pride," and to "come back into the social net."[9] The experiences of the youths highlighted here show how language policy and planning goes

beyond addressing language concerns. The need for language revitalization initiatives – and responses to the need – reflect and address broader issues of community well-being. Just as the shift away from indigenous languages to English (or French) is symptomatic of broader societal changes (including impositions from the outside, disruptions of families, etc.) so too do the responses promise to have wide-ranging effects surpassing the preservation of the language. While a salient goal in itself, promoting communicative competence in the Inuit language promises also to be a catalyst and cornerstone for other aspects of community development.

(D13) I grew up speaking Inuktitut until high school. That's when I started speaking more English than Inuktitut. And where I work, well, I speak more Inuktitut now, which is good, because I realized that I was losing it....

My whole family's Inuk.... When I speak to my dad, usually, it's through my mom.... When I have something to say...I'll...try to say it in Inuktitut, but he won't understand, so my mom will have to repeat it.... I want to move to a smaller community so I'll bring it back, you know? Make it strong again. Because it's my language...my culture. And I don't want to lose it.... It seems like I lost it so fast, you know? Without realizing it.... I'm getting it back. Not as fast as I'm hoping, but I'm doing better, because now I'm speaking it more, like, steady pace.... When I'm helping customers who are elders in...[the store], and they'll ask me stuff in Inuktitut...and I won't know. But it makes me want to visit them more.... Being around more Inuktitut-speaking people. And speaking Inuktitut back to them rather than speaking English. That's what I've been doing. [With] my friend...I'll speak Inuktitut as long as I can. And that's helping.... I just want to speak it.... I know someone who spoke good Inuktitut, then he moved down South...and he lost it, but he gained it back and now he's even stronger. I wish that would happen to me.

Notes

1 Language shift occurs when a community of speakers changes from being predominant speakers of one language (language A) to being predominant speakers of another language (language B). It usually passes through a period of bilingualism, where both languages are used, and ends with reduced knowledge and use of language A at the community level (cf. Fishman, 2001). The shift often occurs over multiple generations. However, in the cases seen here, youth are observing shift in progress (Tulloch, 2004).

2 Revitalization efforts in some areas lead to a new generation learning the indigenous language as a second language, rejuvenating the population of younger speakers (e.g., Norris and Jantzen, 2004).

3 As quoted in RCAP (1996) and the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures (2005), many now tell stories of enforced shame and humiliation for speaking their indigenous language in the schools. For further discussion of Inuit in residential schools, see King (1996) and Milloy (1999, Ch. 11).

4 As seen, for example, in recent interviews and radio call-in shows conducted by the Nunavut Literacy Council.

5 In Nunavut, for example, many authority figures (bosses, teachers, bank managers, RCMP officers), speak English only (elected officials are an exception). The lure of mass media (movies, Internet, television, video games) is largely in English. Non-Inuit in the communities rarely become conversational in the Inuit language. Even Inuit siblings and friends use English (sometimes). In many ways, English has become a default language.

6 The Inuit youth quoted here are all women, aged 20 to 25, living in Iqaluit, interviewed between 1999 and 2001. Their parents are all Inuit. Inuktitut was their mother tongue. Although only three women are quoted, their comments and experiences are typical of the range found in the larger corpus of interviews, questionnaires, and participant observation in the Baffin region. Similar themes have come up in subsequent work in other communities.

7 Reclaiming Our Sinews is an example of a successful initiative that enhanced language learning through interaction between all ages of women in a sewing circle (funded by Canadian Heritage, see description in Nunavut Literacy Council, 2004). The master-apprentice program developed by Leanne Hinton (Hinton et al., 2002) is an example of mentoring partnerships that have been implemented across North America for successful language revitalization.

8 Ideas to this end are developed in Berger (2006) and Martin (2000).

9 Follow-up interviews with Inuit elders suggested that they, too, suffer when youth do not understand the Inuit language. They also experience the disconnect and disruption as their grandchildren and great-grandchildren use what was, in their earlier days, the language of the oppressor. They suffer from the breakdown in intergenerational communication and wish to be part of the revitalization to help youth learn, remember, and use the Inuit language, but also (and so that they can) continue to interact with and learn from the elders.

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Emerging Leaders

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The Inuit Circumpolar Youth Council – A Voice for the Future of Inuit

Youth comprise more than half the population of the 155,000 people represented by the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC).[1] Their numbers and vision are indicative of the budding potency for collective youth action. The Inuit Circumpolar Youth Council (ICYC) was created in 1994 with the mandate to develop the Inuit[2] youth network, develop national Inuit youth organizations, and secure a seat on the ICC executive council. Every four years, during ICC's General Assembly, youth elect a new council consisting of two representatives each from Greenland, Canada, Alaska and Russia (Chukotka), as well as a chair from the host country (rotating).

The 2002-2006 Council was chaired by Miali-Elise Coley (Canada), with executive members Jonathan Epoo, Eric Nutarariaq (Canada), Elizabeth Saagulik Hensley, Lee Ryan (Alaska), Upaluk Poppel, Janus Kleist (Greenland) and Lubov Tajan (Chukotka). This team collaborated primarily via teleconferences and emails. Their efforts focused on suicide prevention, environment, culture, and language.

In 2004, the ICYC began work on what became the First Inuit Circumpolar Youth Symposium on the Inuit Language (ICYSIL).[3] The ICYC had identified language as an area which all Inuit youth could relate to and work with. This focus reflected an expression of unity across borders — a desire to celebrate a common heritage while learning about and accepting differences.[4] Language is considered a basis to advance other priorities as well: it is a vehicle to cultural maintenance; a tool to receive wisdom from elders and build character; and the core of Inuit identity.[5]

The ICYC identified a set of goals to be realized though the Symposium: to instill pride in speaking the Inuit language; to motivate youth to learn or speak it more often; and to inspire youth to respect all dialects. More broadly, the goal of the Symposium was to engage youth in decision-making and to influence continued preservation of the language.

The ICYC hosted the First Inuit Circumpolar Youth Symposium on the Inuit Language in Iqaluit, Nunavut, from August 15 to 19, 2005. The Honourable Louis Tapardjuk, Inuit Elder and Minister of Culture, Language, Elders and Youth (Government of Nunavut, Canada), launched the Symposium with these words: *"As I look around this room, I realize that I am looking at the generation that the rest of us are depending on to carry the Inuit language into the future."* Together, 20 diverse Inuit youth – hunters, artists, students, leaders, teachers – representing Alaska, Greenland and Canada,[6] shared experiences and challenged one another to "ignite the light" of the Inuit language as a "hip" way of speaking. Delegates delivered researched presentations, consulted with elders, listened to speeches by guest language policy and planning specialists,[7] and, above all, engaged in facilitated, focused dialogue.

At the heart of the Symposium was a commitment and call to action. Youth

recognized themselves as agents of language maintenance and development. As individual speakers[8] and as parents, they committed to developing, sharing, and transmitting the Inuit language. As emerging leaders, they committed to disseminating information, soliciting help from the community (especially Elders), and lobbying governments and organizations for support.[9] This commitment, encapsulated in the Report from the ICYSIL (Tulloch, 2005), outlines a set of policy recommendations and guiding principles for personal, community and international Inuit language plans.[10] The policy recommendations include:

- Recognize knowledge of the Inuit language as Inuit's fundamental right.
- Support the development of balanced bilingualism.
- Revamp the education system to accurately reflect and represent Inuit in terms of:
  - Inuit teachers trained and equipped;
  - Inuit knowledge, experiences, and values in curriculum;
  - Inuit language resources;
  - Inuit language used and taught through all grades; and
  - Inuit experts (e.g., Elders) incorporated into learning process; students pursuing holistic learning in the community.
- Facilitate collaboration between generations; between and within communities, regions, and countries and with community members, academics, organizations and governments.
- Secure funding for Inuit-driven initiatives to achieve the above.

The Chair of the ICYC presented the Report to ICC's 2006 General Assembly, and it has already generated a series of new initiatives. Greenlandic linguists and the Language Secretariat have taken up the ideas put forward by ICYC and supported a follow-up survey and Mother Tongue Day events in Greenland. The new ICYC executive (2006-2010) adopted language as a top priority (c.f. Alvanna-Stimpfle 2006). The Symposium Report provided a foundation for the Second Inuit Circumpolar Youth Symposium on the Inuit Language, which took place in Alaska in summer 2007.

Many action plans talk about the incorporation and the engagement of youth (e.g., Canada, 1996; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami [ITK] and ICC, 2007). The First Inuit Circumpolar Youth Symposium on the Inuit Language demonstrates power and capacity of youth to mobilize the necessary knowledge and action plans to impact areas of concern to them and to the broader community.[11] The work of these emerging leaders can be furthered through enhancing opportunities for youth to come together; by acknowledging their voices and their power to mould their future.

Notes

1 Formerly Inuit Circumpolar Conference, named changed at 2006 General Assembly in Barrow, Alaska.

2 Following the usage of ICC and ICYC, "Inuit" in this article includes Inuit, Yupik and Aleut.

3 Primary funding for the Symposium provided by the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, Canadian North, and Qikiqtani Inuit Association.

4 A focus taken up in ICC's 2006 General Assembly slogan "Unity within Diversity."

5 These, and other arguments for the importance of the indigenous language, are also made by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (2005).

6 The Russian delegate was, at the last minute, unable to attend due to visa issues. However, a Russian elder and translator were present.

7 Including Alexina Kublu, Inuk member of the Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures.

8 Language planning researchers, such as Shohamy (2006), have suggested that the real power in shaping language development lies with individual speakers. This is especially true when speakers are in consensus and acting in concert, as the youth delegates of ICYC advocate.

9 Even if researchers are increasingly recognizing that a language's character and vitality are most fundamentally shaped by the sum of individuals' actions, legislation and policy are often required to create a *context* where languages *can* be used and where people *can* act to maintain their languages (cf. Brenzinger, Heine and Sommer, 1991).

10 The ICYSIL Summary Report is available online at <http://inuitcircumpolar.com/files/uploads/icc-files/ICYC-Language Report-English.pdf>.

11 The centrality of language as a concern to Inuit internationally and Aboriginal people more generally is seen, for example, in ICC, 2006a; Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2005; Task Force on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures, 2005.

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The Over-Representation of Aboriginal Youth in Custody

Policy Challenges

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Although some studies have shown a decline in the number of Aboriginal youth in custody in Canada since the introduction of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA) in 2003, the disproportionate number of Aboriginal youth incarcerated remains an important policy concern (Latimer and Foss, 2004; Calverly, 2007). For example, according to the 2001 Census data, Aboriginal youth constituted approximately five percent of the Canadian youth population, yet accounted for 33 percent of incarcerated youth (Latimer and Foss, 2004). Thus, the challenge for policy-makers remains how to reduce the continuing large disparity between the proportion of Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal youth in custody. There are policy options that can respond to this challenge. Based on a review of literature as well as on recent research conducted by some of the authors in British Columbia, this paper discusses some of those options and identifies the associated risk factors that increase the likelihood of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth being sentenced to custody.

Discussion continues among researchers about why there is a disparity in custody rates for both Aboriginal adults and youth. However, there is a growing consensus in the literature on the main risk factors correlated with youth incarceration. Briefly, the three main distal causes for this disparity are: cultural clash, socio-economic factors, and colonialism (Rudin, nd).

First, cultural clash theory postulates that Aboriginal and Western concepts of justice are fundamentally different. As a result, Aboriginal people have historically felt mistreated by the imposition of a Western-based justice system, especially regarding punishment and custodial sentencing. The second theory is largely socio-economic. Stenning and Roberts (2001) assert, for example, that poverty is the primary cause of any group's custodial overrepresentation. The third theory focuses on the catastrophic impact of colonialism on Aboriginal culture and lifestyle. Most importantly, this theory suggests that government policies, explicitly designed to destroy Aboriginal values and traditions through forced assimilation (i.e., the residential school system and the denial of the use of Aboriginal languages and traditions in these schools), in combination with the systematic criminal abuses which took place in these schools and the inter-generational transmission of post-traumatic stress disorders, contributes to the current disproportion of incarcerated Aboriginal youth (Sochting et al., 2007).

Beyond these distal explanations, there are the more proximate risk-factors, largely individual and community based, which arguably provide the most immediate promise for positive policy impacts. These risk factors include extensive reliance on substances and educational shortcomings. According to Latimer and Foss, more than half (57 percent) of incarcerated Aboriginal youth had substance abuse problems, while an additional 25 percent had a suspected problem. In addition, research has indicated that Aboriginal incarcerated youth were approximately two academic years behind their age cohort, and most (89 percent) had attended alternative schools (Corrado and Cohen, 2007).

Based on our research in British Columbia, as well as on research conducted in Australia, there are several policy approaches that we believe can play a role in reducing both Aboriginal youth recidivism and the likelihood of an initial custodial sentence for Aboriginal youth. However, it is beyond the scope of this brief article to discuss all the policy implications that emerge from the research literature. Our focus is limited to two main policy themes: strategies to reduce drug use, and strategies to improve education. These two themes will likely have the most immediate impact on reducing a wide range of risk factors.

Drug Reduction Strategies

The first policy theme is focused on schools and custodial institutions. It involves providing programs to educate youth on the harmful effects of: (1) early drug and alcohol use; (2) persistent drug and alcohol use, including soft drugs; (3) the use of methamphetamines; and, (4) either occasional or persistent use of hard drugs, such as cocaine and heroin. Research has shown (e.g., Renninger and Hoffman, 1999; Ghosh-Dastidar, Longshore, Ellickson, and McCaffrey, 2004) that education programs in schools can reduce substance abuse, such as cigarette smoking and crystal methamphetamine use. Also in this vein, school counsellors, as well as Aboriginal counsellors, peer mentors and elders, can make a difference by providing Aboriginal youth with individual counselling, mentoring, and co-ordinated access to related service needs, such as health care, proper nutrition, anti-bullying programs and victim support, assistance with family problems, and class performance and school retention support.

For the most part, school-based programs are largely preventive as they can reduce the likelihood of both the initial contact with the criminal justice system and, most importantly, help youth to avoid a custody sentence. Yet these types of initiatives are equally important within custodial institutions. In our previous research (Corrado and Cohen, 2002; Cohen and Corrado, 2005) and in our most recent research (Corrado and Cohen, 2007), it is evident that alcohol and drug use remain prevalent among incarcerated young offenders. One study involving 125 Aboriginal youth found that more than 90 percent reported the onset of drug and alcohol use at a very young age (approximately 11 years old). In custodial contexts, psychiatric and psychological diagnostic services are also important because it is very likely that the frequent use of drugs, especially hard drugs, is associated with childhood traumas often involving family histories of drug, alcohol, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as mental illness and criminality (Corrado and Cohen, 2002; Cohen and Corrado, 2005).

In cases where risk factors are confirmed, intensive therapy services provided both during the incarceration period and after in the community are important. Regarding the latter, in order to sustain positive changes achieved while in custody, the availability of drug-free Aboriginal housing facilities in major urban centres, such as Vancouver is important. This is supported by literature on alcohol and drug relapse which conclude that without community-based resources, "safe houses," and the presence of mentors, most Aboriginal youth who abused drugs or alcohol will relapse when they return to their former "street life" or peer group contexts (Health Canada, nd; Linklater, 1991).

The importance of school and custodial drug services was also supported by Weatherburn, Snowball, and Hunter (2006), who concluded that school and custodial drug services were necessary to reduce indigenous overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. According to Weatherburn et al. (2006), the effects of drug use were stronger than those of any other risk factor, with the exception of gender. And, regarding imprisonment, substance abuse had the highest effect among the 16 factors identified in the research literature as risk factors for youth and adult contact with criminal justice systems or imprisonment generally and among Aboriginal people specifically. Weatherburn et al. (2006) recommended that coerced treatment programs, such as drug courts, be considered since there is strong evidence based on their other research that they reduce recidivism rates.

Regarding the YCJA, one such mechanism that could be used to a greater degree is the Intensive Rehabilitative Custody and Supervision order (IRCS). Typically reserved for the most serious offences, this mechanism provides custodial sentenced youth with the opportunity to avoid adult sentences in exchange for participating in a comprehensive rehabilitation program while in custody and continuing for a period of time while on a probation order in the community. A distinct advantage to this option is that it facilitates the use of individually

designed, integrated services over a substantial period of time, which is needed for such services to have a significant positive impact. Too often, effective treatment or rehabilitative programs are not used in youth custody because the time a youth typically spends in custody is too short to make significant positive progress. However, expanding the use of sentencing options, such as IRCS, would require both federal legislative changes to modify the range of offences which make a young offender eligible for this option and an increase in federal funding for such intensive rehabilitation programs.

Given that Aboriginal youth, under the YCJA, are subject to a "Gladue Report" (*R. v. Gladue*, 1999), which instructs judges and probation officers to specifically consider the special needs of Aboriginal youth during sentencing, provincial policies could ensure that treatment interventions, when appropriate, are linked to all custodial sentences with probation orders. This would ensure that all rehabilitative or treatment programs are continued in the community once the youth is released from custody. These changes would help to address a basic policy challenge for probation officers: obtaining the resources and programs needed to implement an integrated custody-to-community rehabilitation plan, such as psychiatric or psychological treatment, anger management programs, and housing. Paradoxically, while there are sufficient numbers of Aboriginal youth in major urban centres to justify the cost of treatment programs, the substantial reduction of Aboriginal youth in custody has resulted in far fewer resources being available in non-urban areas as facilities and resources have been cut. For example, three rural-based youth custodial centres (Boulder Bay, Centre Creek, and Lakeview) have been closed and far fewer programs are financially sustainable in non-urban regions. In contrast, there are waiting lists for several resources and programs in the densely populated Vancouver and Lower Mainland regions of British Columbia.

Education Strategies

In addition to substance abuse policies, there is a growing need to focus on education programs, specifically those designed to increase school performance and retention. There is extensive empirical literature indicating that early problems in school are associated with other risk factors for contact with youth justice system (Loeber and Farrington, 2001). While there is continuing debate about whether school failure and poor school performance are a direct cause of the risk of criminal justice contact and incarceration, there is complete consensus that positive school experiences are a protective factor and a very important indirect factor (Maguin and Loeber, 1996).

Not surprisingly, the education profile in our most recent research on youth in custody confirmed that problems in school, including school performance, were pervasive among both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. Virtually the entire sample reported that they had previously skipped an entire day of school beginning, on average, at age 12. Moreover, Aboriginal young offenders reported changing schools (non-grade advancement), on average, five times beginning at age 10; most of these youth changed schools because they were expelled for assaulting other students (63 percent), bringing a weapon to school (58 percent), or being caught with illegal drugs (58 percent) (Corrado and Cohen, 2007).

There is strong evidence that programs that assist children who exhibit learning difficulties in pre-school, kindergarten, and the initial elementary school grades can be effective in facilitating positive school performance experiences. (Herrenkohl et al., 2001; Trembley and LeManquard, 2001). These programs often have a home visit component to assist the parents or primary caregiver in teaching their children basic learning skills. This strategy is particularly important since single parent mothers who are 18 years old or younger are increasingly prevalent within First Nations and Aboriginal communities.

The school component can include specialized teaching instructors and classes focused on learning disorders, as well as Attention Deficit Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disordered children. Aboriginal language programs, such as the unevaluated Stó:lō Nation's experimental Stó:lō language program, may also help Aboriginal children to adopt more positive early identities as well as develop general language skills.

In terms of school-based strategies, provincial and local school district education policies should be co-ordinated with First Nations education officials. In British Columbia, for example, youth from the Stó:lō Nation attend schools in several districts, and have access to programs specific to the Stó:lō Nation. Within

the Chilliwack School District, Stó:lō Nation representatives participate in the development of certain parts of the school curriculum, to facilitate school performance and retention among Stó:lō students. The Stó:lō Nation also has a program for school dropouts who want to return to complete their basic schooling as adults. Several of these programs are currently being evaluated by request of the Stó:lō Nation and Chilliwack School District, and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. In addition, British Columbia has recently created a First Nations school board which will focus on many of the above policy issues.

Another important policy component involves emphasizing better identification of youth with multiple risk factors, and then providing individual case planning designed to assist students with their entire range of risk factors. One promising model program, introduced by the Ford Foundation in the United States, consisted of coaching and cash incentives to encourage school retention. The evaluation of this program found that participants had nearly one third (30 percent) the arrest rate of those who did not participate (Greenwood et al., 1998). Similarly, the Mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg (2007), recently introduced a privately funded program ("conditional cash transfers") to provide targeted cash incentives to parents of "at-risk" children for undertaking specified routine tasks with their children, including helping with homework, doctor visits, and parent-teacher meetings.

While many innovative programs focus on children and adolescents, labour market programs are also important for increasing the employment possibilities of older at-risk youth; those between the ages of 16 and 18 years old. The Job Corps program in the United States and the Australian Community Development Project, which was specifically aimed at chronically high Indigenous unemployment rates, both showed positive effects on reducing arrest rates (Weatherburn et al., 2006).

Within custodial institutions, school programs are among the most popular with youth. According to a recent McCreary Centre Society report (2007), incarcerated youth in British Columbia detention centres viewed the school program as providing them with a positive learning context, and they wanted related programs to be expanded. As with other custodial programs, the typically short amount of custody time calls for a co-ordination of in-custody programs with those based in the community.

Two other important considerations emerge. First, large class sizes in community schools and more competitive academic contexts do not facilitate a positive learning experience for many multi-risk youth. Second, alternative schools can stigmatize youth as this approach removes youth from regular schools, thus identifying and labelling the student as challenging, problematic, or at risk.

Conclusion

It is beyond the scope of this short article to discuss the array of remaining risk factors associated with the disproportionate custodial rates of Aboriginal youth. Among the most important are pregnancy risks involving fetal damage affected by excessive stress, malnutrition, smoking, drugs, and alcohol. We have argued elsewhere (Corrado et al., 2002) about the need to institute systematic information gathering for high-risk families and children in order to reduce the entire profile of risks at the earliest possible stages. Also, it is important for policy researchers to review the more integrated systems that hold more promise for successfully addressing the needs of above families and youth. Examples of such models exist in Quebec, Sweden, France, and the United Kingdom (e.g., Trepanier, 2004). In other words, there are no simple policies that will reduce the disproportionate number of Aboriginal youth in custody. Instead, there is convincing research indicating that policies involving early, comprehensive and integrated services and programs for high-risk or multi-risk Aboriginal youth and their families are required in order to reduce the disproportionate number of Aboriginal youth in custody.

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First Nations Youth Health

Recognizing the Challenges, Recognizing the Potential

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The authors wish to recognize the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) Youth Council and the First Nations Information Governance Committee, which have provided the direction and knowledge base from which this article was developed.

The AFN Youth Council has set out a vision for First Nations' future generations:

> Our people will live as healthy, self-determining First Nations in which they value and respect their individual lives, families, communities, and nations. Our future generations will be raised only on truth and they will live and love their traditional roles, family history, and understand how history relates to who they are. Our people will trust – trust within themselves, within the family, trust within the community, and with other nations, lands and resources.[1]

In developing this vision, the AFN Youth Council is seeking to motivate First Nations youth to take charge of their lives and secure a better standard of life, one not weakened by the long-standing effects of colonization or the intergenerational legacy of Indian residential schools.

If the majority of First Nations youth are to realize this vision, several challenges will need to be overcome, with support from national and regional policy and program interventions. As a starting point for informing the development and monitoring of these interventions, this article reviews recent data on First Nations youth living in their communities from the culturally relevant First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS) 2002-03.[2] As a First Nations-led initiative, the RHS itself provides an example of how First Nations leaders are proactively seeking to inform possible actions in First Nations communities that would offer youth greater opportunities for health, education, traditional teachings, and employment.

Recognizing the Challenges

Living in Balance

According to the RHS 2002-03, the majority of First Nations youth report being in a state of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual balance all or most of the time (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005a: 221). A majority (57.2%) also considered themselves to be in very good or excellent health (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005a: 160). First Nations generally experience health as broader than, strictly speaking, the absence of disease. For instance, a recent study of 25 Aboriginal youth from British Columbia found that expressing emotion/cleansing was one of the most successful strategies to help suicidal youth (Kelly, 2007: 9).

Traditional healing practices espouse the notion of working on enhancing all aspects of one's life including the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual aspects. It requires individuals to search within themselves to recognize and address the underlying causes of their problems. This process of coming into "balance" or "wholeness" is truly a spiritual process, or a process in which the return to traditional spiritual beliefs and practices becomes an integral

part of healing (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005a: 116).

According to the RHS 2002-03, one in eight First Nations youth had consulted a traditional healer within the year (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005a: 223). However, a much higher proportion of youth — ranging between one in three and one in four (depending on gender) remain actively engaged in traditional activities such as hunting, fishing, trapping, and berry-picking or food-gathering (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005a: 168). About one quarter speak their First Nations language and 82 percent consider it important (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b).

Yet, just over one in four First Nations youth report feeling sad, blue or depressed for two weeks in a row during the course of a year. One in five First Nations youth respondents had a close friend or family member commit suicide in the past year, which also significantly increased their likelihood of having been injured themselves (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b: 187). They were also twice as likely to have thoughts of suicide ideation as those not affected by suicide (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b).

By age 12, 10 percent of First Nations youth have thought about suicide at least once (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005a: 221). This rate climbs to 30 percent at age 17 (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005a). For First Nations youth having at least one parent who attended a residential school, more than one in four (26.3%) have thought about suicide, compared to only 18 percent of those whose parents did not attend a residential school (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005a: 217).

There is also an important gender difference. Male youth are more likely to report being in balance physically and mentally all the time (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005a: 220). Correspondingly, First Nations girls are about twice as likely as boys to consider suicide, despite higher suicide mortality rates among boys (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005a: 222). Further exploration is required to determine the root causes of this gender difference.

Physical Health

As noted above, while the majority of First Nations youth perceive themselves as being in good or excellent health, they are exposed to important risk factors that will presumably affect their long-term physical health. More than two fifths (42%) of First Nations youth are either overweight or obese, and only 45 percent are considered sufficiently active; that is, engaging in 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity most days of the week (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b).

Walking is the most frequently reported physical activity among First Nations youth across all age groups. Just over half report watching three hours or more of television daily, and one in five reports playing video games or using a computer for the same length of time (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b). Overall, 33.5 percent consume a nutritious and balanced diet (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b: 169). Briefly stated, a positive correlation has been found among First Nations youth who are sufficiently active, eat a nutritious and balanced diet, consume berries or wild vegetation and cultural foods, do not have suicidal thoughts, and never smoke cigarettes (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b: 169, 171-172).

Allergies, asthma and chronic ear infections or problems are the most common chronic conditions reported among First Nations youth. These are also the same conditions most commonly found among First Nations children (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b: 178).

Injuries are highly prominent among First Nations youth, reported by just fewer than 50 percent in the space of one year (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b: 184). This is almost double the rate among both Canadian youth and First Nations youth living outside their communities. Data from the RHS 2002-03 suggest that there are barriers to access to treatment for First Nations youth affected by conditions that can have serious impacts on their long-term health and school performance. For instance, while about two thirds of First Nations youth are affected by asthma only 16.5 percent of those affected by chronic bronchitis and 12.6 percent of those diagnosed with a learning disability are receiving treatment for

these conditions (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b).

Health-related Behaviours

Non-traditional tobacco use is prevalent among 37.8 percent of First Nations youth, with higher rates among females, older youth and youth living in isolated communities. Between the ages of 12 and 14, the smoking rate almost triples. Most First Nations youth start smoking during their twelfth year. For those who quit smoking, the average age is 14 and the main reason is choosing a healthier lifestyle, followed by quitting out of respect for loved ones. Close to 70 percent of First Nations youth report attempting to quit smoking over the past year. Although the smoking rate among First Nations youth is higher than among other Canadian youth, the average number of cigarettes smoked per day is lower, at 5.9 versus 8.1 cigarettes (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b: 203-205).

Approximately 65 percent of First Nations youth report consuming more than five drinks in one sitting at least once per month, while 32.7 percent have used cannabis. First Nations youth smokers are more likely to consume both alcohol and cannabis. The RHS 2002-03 findings reinforce previous studies that emphasize the need to prevent early smoking initiation (13 years and younger), not only to address health risks associated with smoking but also to "produce secondary healthy effects by blocking the gateway drug hypothesis" (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b).

First Nations youth who do not indulge in smoking, alcohol and substance use are more likely to agree to some extent that they like the way they are; that they have a lot to be proud of; that many things about them are good; and that they have never thought about suicide (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b: 204). Similarly, they are more likely to be less stressed and feel loved a lot, as well as report that they have someone to take them to the doctor any time there is the need (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b).

A lower proportion of First Nations youth report being sexually active than other Canadian youth generally, although First Nations youth aged 12 to 14 are 8 percent to 9 percent more likely to be sexually active than their other Canadian peers. First Nations youth are, in the majority, using condoms (81%), although many fewer report using birth control pills (19.2%). Considerably more First Nations young males report condom use than their other Canadian peers. Approximately 4.5% of First Nations youth report having been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b).

Education

Physical well-being has been found to directly affect school educatic n among First Nations youth. First Nations youth who rated their overall health as fair or poor are more likely not to attend school, not to like school, or to experience learning problems (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b: 160).

The factors underlying reduced school performance among First Nations youth are also found to be related to increased alcohol consumption, smoking, and sexual activity. Furthermore, over half (57.4%) of First Nations youth live in households with six or more people, mostly family. Those experiencing crowded conditions are more likely to report having repeated a grade.

Eating a nutritious diet, participating in sports, music groups, and traditional activities such as drumming and dancing, and engaging more frequently in physical activity are all good predictors of better school performance and attendance (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b: 167). While First Nations youth with one or both parents having attended residential schools are more likely to have learning difficulties or to repeat a grade, no such association has been found among those with grandparents who attended residential schools. This could indicate a generational decrease in the impacts of residential school attendance (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005b).

Recognizing the Potential

The rapid increase of the First Nations population means that thousands of First Nations youth will be entering the labour force in the next two decades. More than half of First Nations people living in their communities are under 25 years of age (HRSDC, 2005). According to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and the Aboriginal Population Census 2001, over 300,000 jobs will need to be created by 2016

for Aboriginal people just to accommodate the growth of the Aboriginal working-age population and close the gap in employment between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians.

Canada overall is facing a decline in its working age population and this will lead to a smaller labour force and increased risk of labour shortages. Besides recruiting skilled workers through immigration, another option for dealing with potential skill shortages is to improve labour force participation among groups that are under-represented in the labour market. The First Nations youth population is a unique resource that could meaningfully contribute to Canada's future prosperity and global competitiveness.

At the core of creating opportunities for First Nations is the need for a holistic, sustainable and long-term strategy to address their resiliency. Factors that have been found to contribute to enhancing the resiliency of First Nations youth and, therefore, protect youth from suicidal tendencies include:

> a strong sense of identity and self-worth; healthy and supportive families and communities; strong coping skills; knowledge of culture and language; a belief in one's ability to handle life's problems; and a positive view of the future. Activities aimed at resiliency will include developing and sharing culturally relevant training tools, and resources that foster resiliency; engaging youth in planning for suicide prevention; and supporting the development of Aboriginal youth leaders (Kelly, 2007: 70).

The RHS 2002-03 reveals the critical importance of providing First Nations youth with a basic standard of living equal to that enjoyed by most Canadian youth in order to enhance their educational attainment. This in turn would reduce their likelihood of engaging in at-risk behaviours such as suicidal ideation, increased alcohol consumption, and sexual activity. This basic standard would include a balanced and nutritious diet, opportunities for sport and cultural programs (including traditional drumming and dancing) and safe housing conditions. For instance, as stated in the RHS final report,

> health education programs that relate to the effects of increased alcohol consumption [smoking] and sexual activity on school performance need to be designed and implemented at an early age and grade… Encouragement of, and access to, active treatment for health conditions may produce a positive result relating to school performance (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005a: 165).

In addition to providing opportunities for safe physical activity, food security and access to needed health services, First Nations youth must also have access to the professional and peer supports required to make informed decisions about their health and well-being in the future:

> When First Nations youth are in need of assistance in dealing with problems they face, they most often turn to their parents or guardians, friends their own age, or no one at all. The proportion of youth who report having difficulties with their mental health is greater than those who appear to be accessing either Western-based mental health services or consulting with traditional healers. Therefore, service providers within communities are not getting an opportunity to provide help when it is most needed (Readin et al., 2007: 23).
>
> Based on evidence reviewed, it is further recommended for youth social support that the focus of programming change to a more holistic and traditionally consistent pattern of fulfilling extended family and community roles. Additionally, communities should be supported to develop strategies that will improve the extent to which youth access these more broadly defined mental health services (Readin et al., 2007: 26).

Fundamentally, however, investing in First Nations youth also means investing in First Nations governments and communities. There is growing evidence of the relationship between enhanced self-esteem and resiliency of First Nations youth and First Nations measures of First Nations self-government or community control over services. Among First Nations youth in British Columbia, Chandler and Lalonde

have shown the correlation between lower rates of youth suicide within First Nations communities and higher levels of "cultural continuity"; that is, communities in which one or more of the following factors were present: self-government, land claims, control over educational systems, health services, police and fire services, and the availability of cultural facilities to members (See Chandler and Lalonde article in this volume).

The RHS 2002-03 reinforces these findings. For instance, it demonstrates that First Nations youth from communities not part of a health transfer agreement are more likely to report being in physical balance almost none of the time. Conversely, youth from communities that are part of a multi-community health transfer agreement are more likely to report being in spiritual balance all of the time (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005a: 221). A correlation was also found between a higher number of First Nations youth who attend school in those communities that have negotiated a health transfer agreement (First Nations Information Governance Committee et al., 2005a: 163).

Creating the Opportunity to Dream

Briefly stated, the resiliency and leadership of First Nations youth in Canada is vital to the cultural continuity and self-determination of First Nations peoples. In 2003, the AFN Youth Council initiated the development and pilot of two youth training programs: CEPS (Cultural-Economic-Political-Social), directed at leadership training, and the Young Eagles Challenge, focused on peer-to-peer training on sexual health (since evolved into the areas of suicide prevention and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD)). Both innovative tools have received limited funding support for curriculum delivery since their pilot stages. Nevertheless, they remain potential vehicles for fostering national, regional and community-based First Nations youth leadership and peer support. Since 2005, a National Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy totalling $65 million over five years has also been implemented.

Notwithstanding these national initiatives, addressing the key determinants of First Nations youth health and well-being requires a comprehensive, long-term and sustainable approach to First Nations self-government and community development. Only then can their full potential be explored for the benefit of all First Nations and Canadians. As argued by the AFN in 2006, a successful approach to First Nations community development will require tackling the chronic under-funding of First Nations community budgets over the past decade, recognizing and implementing First Nations governments, and establishing mutually acceptable and effective relationships among First Nations and federal, provincial and territorial governments (AFN, 2006). Existing policies and programs are fragmented, generally under-funded and unable to respond to emerging issues that threaten youth resiliency and leadership. Such issues include criminal gang activity, crystal meth and prescription drug addictions, loss of First Nations languages, etc.

Specific to the area of youth leadership, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples had recommended a national campaign to raise First Nations youth awareness of their opportunities to serve their Nations in the advent of self-government (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). RCAP suggested that a national Aboriginal youth policy should reach several key program areas: education, justice, health and healing, sports and recreation, and support for those living in urban centers. Such a national policy supporting First Nations youth initiatives has yet to be undertaken. While we have neglected to effectively invest in creating opportunities for the last generation of First Nations youth, we must remain inspired and driven to meet the needs of today's youth and of those generations to come.

Notes

1 AFN Youth Council. Cultural-Economic-Political-Social Youth Development Leadership Training. 2004. Unpublished.

2 The RHS is a survey undertaken by First Nations. It was self-administered to 4,983 youth, aged 12 to 17, between August 2002 and November 2003 The 2002-03 survey sample was designed to represent the First Nations population living in First Nations communities in all provinces and territories except Nunavut. Overall, 238 communities were included and 5.9% of the target population was surveyed. The sampling rate was 10% among youth.

Full references are available in the online version of this issue. It can be accessed by visiting the PRI web site at <www.policyresearch.gc.ca>

Strengthening Engagement Programming for Urban Aboriginal Youth

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Aboriginal youth represent one of the greatest demographic challenges facing policy-makers in Canada today. The statistics can be stated in a number of ways. However, the "three 50s" might have the greatest impact. According to the 2001 Census, 50 percent of Aboriginal people live in urban areas, 50 percent of all Aboriginal people are under the age of 25, and 50 percent of all Aboriginal people do not graduate from high school. Consider for a moment the significant and varied policy and programming implications that this raises. We need to have programs available to urban Aboriginal youth that are able to address the social issues raised by an under-educated and impoverished population.

The Urban Multipurpose Aboriginal Youth Centre (UMAYC) Initiative is one of the few programs that currently exists across the country for addressing these particular challenges. Created in 1998 as a component of *Gathering Strength*, the federal government's response to the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples, the UMAYC Initiative seeks to improve the cultural, social, economic and personal prospects of urban Aboriginal youth, through culturally relevant projects focused on health, life skills and personal development. There are four separate partners and delivery structures for UMAYC: the National Association of Friendship Centres (NAFC)[1], which delivers approximately $10.5 million in programming across Canada; the Métis National Council, and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, each of which administers programming for their respective communities; and finally, the Department of Canadian Heritage, which delivers UMAYC programming directly in Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Prince Albert, Edmonton, and Calgary. The total value of programming provided under this initiative through all of these partners is approximately $25 million a year.

The UMAYC represents a unique model of programming for Aboriginal youth in at least two ways. First, the initiative ensures that Aboriginal youth are engaged in all aspects of programming; from proposal evaluations, to program management and local activities. As project proposals are submitted, decisions on which programs to fund are made by committees of Aboriginal youth. These committees are composed of at least 50 percent youth from the regions where programming is being considered. These youth are empowered to review and evaluate programming proposals which may take place. In essence, youth are able to ensure that programming under this Initiative is meeting needs they understand only too well. In addition, youth are involved in the governance of every project funded by the Initiative. Once projects are approved, they must have a youth council which oversees the delivery of the project, and a youth must act as one of the signing authorities.

Second, as a key objective, the UMAYC initiative seeks to continually remain relevant to the needs of local communities. By setting broad programming objectives and allowing local communities to devise their

own, often unique, programming responses, we are able to ensure that relevant programming is available. Across Canada, community organizations are able to come together and plan for the services and interventions that are required in their communities. This is essential as we try to understand the vast circumstances and experiences urban Aboriginal youth face. In Fort Smith, for example, Northwest Territories programming is developed using traditional culture and games to reach youth. From Vancouver to Halifax, urban Aboriginal youth and youth-serving organizations are able to shape programming which will have the maximum impact for youth in their community.

Using this process, the NAFC has been able to have a tremendous impact across the country. In the first six years of the program, more than 325,000 participants have accessed programming through NAFC administered projects. Each year an average of 100 projects across the country take place in all categories of eligible projects. For 2006 alone, more than 69,000 youth accessed UMAYC programming through the NAFC process. This represents a significant number of urban Aboriginal people accessing timely and relevant programming. In essence, the success of the program can be attributed to the fact that UMAYC is programming by youth, for youth.

Based on our observations, the approach espoused by the UMAYC has yielded a number of positive outcomes for urban Aboriginal youth. When youth are engaged in programming, they are not involved in negative behaviours. Gym nights, camps, cultural workshops and the like take the place of other, less positive pursuits. There are arguably downstream impacts as well, as it is believed that youth who consistently access culture-based programming may become better equipped to succeed academically and in the labour market.

When youth are engaged in programming, they are not involved in negative behaviours.

Where funding is available, the impact on Aboriginal youth is dramatic and demonstrable. Ma-mow-we-tek Friendship Centre in Thompson, Manitoba has used the funding from the UMAYC Initiative to operate a successful Youth Justice program. The program offers recreational, educational and cultural programming and referrals for specialized services outside the Centre. Averaging 25-30 youths per night, the program is open to all youth in Thompson. An employment worker helps teenagers begin contemplating their future careers, a street-involved youth worker targets those youth called "couch drifters" and an Elder provides drug and alcohol counselling. The Youth Council engages in its own fundraising program giving them ownership of the programs and services provided, while keeping numerous youth off the streets and busy with cultural activities.

In Lillooet, British Columbia the Friendship Centre has developed a program model to address issues of social cohesion. In the past, community members in Lillooet have been vocal about Aboriginal youth "hanging out" on Main Street. In response, a UMAYC project was developed to address this issue head on. A safe, culturally appropriate program is running which is bringing Aboriginal youth off the street, and into progressive programming. Last year, this program provided services to more than 500 youth. As a result, other agencies and levels of government are supporting this project through increased funds, providing workshops and increasing partnerships. Today, violence and vandalism are declining and the community is more coordinated and effective in its responses.

These projects are just two of more than a hundred nationally which are improving the quality of life for urban Aboriginal people.

This is the motivation behind UMAYC: to support improvements to quality of life. For example, surely the ultimate programming success for UMAYC would be contributing to more youth graduating from high school. Finishing high school leads directly to long-term positive outcomes, such as better employment prospects, higher income levels, better housing status, fewer contacts with the justice system, increased health status and many others.

Another example is the importance of providing quality supports for single mothers: in this instance, the benefits of the program are multiplied, as mother and child are helped.

This makes it all the more surprising that more programming options do not exist for urban Aboriginal youth. There is still a significant lack of programming and policy supports for this critical demographic group. Outside of UMAYC there are no programming supports available. The federal government is involved in a number of critical and effective early years programs: the Aboriginal Head Start Program, Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program and Community Action Plan for Children all provide extensive and effective programming for Aboriginal Children aged zero (pre-natal) to six. However, there is no programming available for the ages of seven to thirteen. Outside of justice and alcohol and drug programs there are no programming options for Aboriginal children after age six.

Conclusion

From our vantage point as urban Aboriginal service providers, the UMAYC initiative has been a great success. However, the ability of the program to reach young Aboriginal Canadians is limited, in terms of operational parameters (projects funded on a yearly basis, inhibiting momentum), regional coverage (funding allocated on a regional basis rather than to discrete communities, meaning large cities such as Toronto, Montréal, Halifax and others have not benefited from targeted initiatives) and demographic scope (UMAYC programs limited to youth aged 12 and older, leaving the 7-12 age group uncovered). More young people, in more places and more age categories, would benefit were these limitations addressed. Based on our experience working with Aboriginal youth in urban areas, programs like the UMAYC initiative leave an enduring legacy in terms of the quality services provided to and experienced by young Aboriginal Canadians. Given that so many Aboriginal Canadians are urban-based, poor, and under 25 years of age, there is a clear impetus for governments and community stakeholders to act to ensure these young people have the opportunity to take their rightful place in Canadian society. The question is, are we ready to do what it takes?

Note

1 The NAFC delivers UMAYC programming in nine identified regions across Canada. Specific regional processes are conducted in: Vancouver; British Columbia (excluding Vancouver); the North (Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut); Alberta; Saskatchewan; Manitoba; Ontario; Quebec; and the East (Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island).

Housing Need and Residential Mobility among Urban Aboriginal Children and Youth

Stewart Clatworthy
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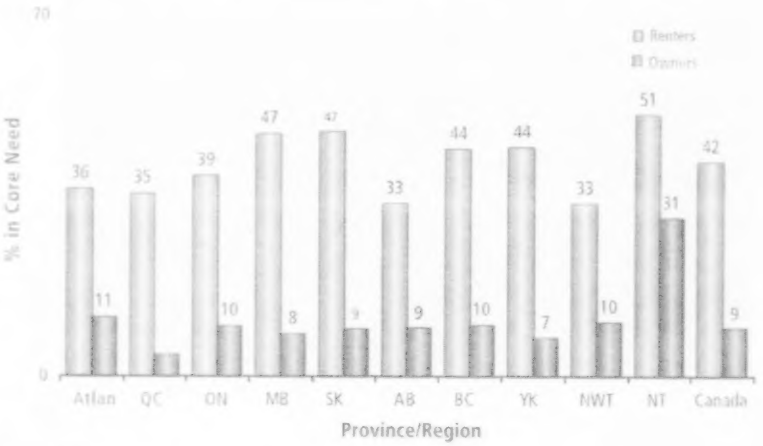
A substantial body of research exists on the mobility patterns of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Much of this research, however, focuses on one dimension of mobility: migrating or moving between communities.[1] Residential mobility or changing residence within the same community represents another dimension of mobility that has not been explored to any great extent within the context of Canada's Aboriginal population. This latter dimension of mobility is important, as it constitutes the major process through which households and individuals adjust their housing situations in response to changes in needs and resources.

Several studies over the past two decades documented the housing difficulties experienced by urban Aboriginal populations (Clatworthy and Stevens, 1987; Spector, 1996). Little of this research, however, examined the housing circumstances of movers and non-movers and the extent to which residential moves result in acceptable housing situations.

This paper presents results from a broader research effort exploring the housing circumstances and needs of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.[2] It focuses on the housing needs and residential mobility rates of Aboriginal children (0-14 years of age) and youth (15-29 years of age) living off reserve in urban areas. Housing outcomes and other implications associated with residential moves by members of this segment of the urban

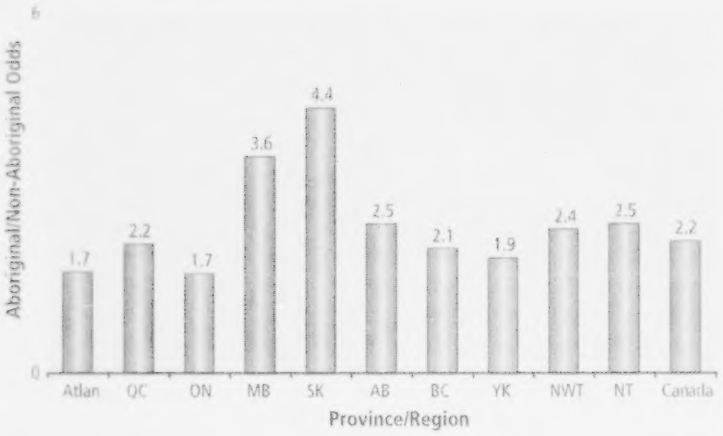
FIGURE 1
Proportion of Urban Aboriginal Children and Youth Experiencing Core Housing Need by Tenure and Province/Region, Canada, 2001



Source: Custom tabulations from the 2001 Census of Canada.

FIGURE 2

Relative (Aboriginal versus Non-Aboriginal) Odds of Children and Youth Experiencing Core Housing Need, by Province/Region, Canada, 2001



Source: Custom tabulations from the 2001 Census of Canada.

Aboriginal population are also highlighted. The research is based on data from the 2001 Census of Canada.[3]

Housing Needs of Urban Aboriginal Children and Youth

In Canada, housing needs (or consumption deficiencies) are commonly discussed in relation to three consumption standards: affordability, quality, and adequacy. However, the existence of housing consumption deficiencies should not necessarily be viewed as reflecting housing consumption problems. For example, some households that do not meet the adequacy standard may be able to acquire larger housing that is suitable for their needs without exceeding the affordability standard. To measure housing consumption problems, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation developed the concept of "core" housing need. A household is deemed to experience core housing need if it fails to meet one or more of the consumption standards and its income is lower than that needed to obtain a dwelling unit that meets all three standards in the local marketplace.

Estimates of core housing need for the population of Aboriginal children and youth living in urban areas are presented in Figure 1. At the national level, 71,750, or roughly 30 percent, of all urban Aboriginal children and youth experienced core housing need in 2001. The prevalence of core housing need, however, varied sharply by tenure group and was roughly five times more common among those living in rental (42%) as opposed to owner-occupied (9%) dwelling units. The figure also reveals large regional variations, especially among those living in rental accommodations: core housing need was more common among urban Aboriginal children and youth in Nunavut, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Yukon.

The differentials in core housing need among urban Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and youth are presented in Figure 2 in the form of odds-ratios.[4] The ratios reveal that the prevalence of core housing need was sharply higher among Aboriginal children and youth in all provinces/regions compared to non-Aboriginal children and youth. At the national level, Aboriginal children and youth living in urban areas were roughly 2.2 times more likely to experience core housing need than their non-Aboriginal counterparts; in urban areas in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the prevalence of core housing need among Aboriginal children and youth was at least 3.6 times higher than among non-Aboriginal children and youth.

The high levels of core housing need experienced by urban Aboriginal children and youth result, to a large extent, from low household and family incomes. Among children and youth residing in households experiencing core housing need, 84 percent had problems with housing affordability, 29 percent experienced problems with housing adequacy (overcrowding), and 23 percent reported housing quality (condition) issues. Thirty-six percent experienced multiple consumption deficiencies.

Residential Mobility among Urban Aboriginal Children and Youth

As shown in Table 1, the residential mobility rate for the combined population of urban Aboriginal children and youth was 264.3 per 1,000 during the 2000-2001 period, a rate roughly 1.9 times higher than that of non-Aboriginal children and youth. Residential mobility was more common among Aboriginal youth than children and much more common among registered Indian children and youth than for other Aboriginal groups.

TABLE 1
Annual Rate of Residential Mobility (per 1,000 Population) among Urban Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Children and Youth by Aboriginal Group, Canada, 2000-2001

Population Group	Age Group		
	Children	Youth	Children and Youth
Registered Indian	258.7	340.9	295.7
Non-Registered Indian	211.0	289.7	245.2
Métis	191.5	285.9	237.3
Inuit	188.4	259.5	218.4
Aboriginal	225.4	310.0	264.3
Non-Aboriginal	98.5	172.7	137.1
Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal	2.3	1.8	1.9

Source: Custom tabulations from the 2001 Census of Canada.

TABLE 2
Annual Rate of Residential Mobility (per 1,000 Households) among Urban Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Households Maintained by Youth and Families with Children by Tenure, Canada, 2000-2001

Population Group	Youth (15-29 years) Maintainer			All Families with Children	Youth Households and Families with Children
	Non-Families	Childless Couples	Families with Children		
Renter Mobility Rate					
Aboriginal	541.0	494.5	421.6	298.7	350.6
Non-Aboriginal	427.0	377.5	336.4	187.5	261.4
Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.6	1.3
Owner Mobility Rate					
Aboriginal	326.2	274.9	210.	84.8	101.4
Non-Aboriginal	280.1	268.1	165.4	57.7	71.4
Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal	1.2	1.0	381.3	1.5	1.4
Combined Tenure Mobility Rate					
Aboriginal	514.5	398.4	381.3	203.0	251.2
Non-Aboriginal	404.0	289.6	272.5	96.0	141.1
Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal	1.3	1.4	1.4	2.1	1.8
Homeownership Rate (%)					
Aboriginal	12.4	26.6	30.2	59.4	40.2
Non-Aboriginal	15.7	37.4	50.5	79.5	63.0
Aboriginal/Non-Aboriginal	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.6

Source: Custom tabulations from the 2001 Census of Canada.

TABLE 3
Prevalence of Core Housing Need among Urban Aboriginal Families with Children Who Rent Accommodation by Residential Mobility Status and Province/Region, Canada, 2001

Province/Region	% in Core Need		Mover/Non-Mover
	Non-Movers	Movers	
Atlantic Region	35.0	44.8	1.3
Quebec	27.7	39.8	1.4
Ontario	38.5	47.4	1.2
Manitoba	47.1	53.5	1.1
Saskatchewan	43.6	56.7	1.3
Alberta	34.8	39.0	1.1
British Columbia	45.2	55.7	1.2
Yukon	42.2	42.9	1.0
Northwest Territories	32.1	35.5	1.1
Nunavut	50.0	44.1	0.9
Canada	40.5	49.6	1.2

Source: Custom tabulations from the 2001 Census of Canada.

Table 2 provides more detailed information concerning the mobility patterns of urban Aboriginal children and youth. The table displays estimates of residential mobility rates for households and families maintained by Aboriginal youth and for all Aboriginal families and children.[5] It reveals that more than one quarter of these urban Aboriginal households moved between 2000 and 2001, a level of movement roughly 1.8 times higher than that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Residential mobility rates were especially high among households and families maintained by Aboriginal youth.

The importance of tenure is indicated by the much higher rates of residential mobility displayed among urban Aboriginal households renting accommodation.[6] Among childless households maintained by Aboriginal youth (i.e., non-families and childless couples), residential mobility rates were roughly 1.8 times higher among renters than homeowners. Among families with children, residential mobility rates among renters were between 2.0 and 3.5 times higher than among homeowners. Similar differences in residential mobility rates existed among non-Aboriginal renters and homeowners.

Housing Quality and Residential Mobility

Even though much of the higher rate of residential mobility recorded for Aboriginal as opposed to non-Aboriginal households and families appears to be associated with tenure differences, the residential mobility rates of young Aboriginal households and families with children exceeded those of their non-Aboriginal counterparts among both renters and homeowners. Accordingly, factors other than tenure must also contribute to higher rates of Aboriginal residential mobility.

Although Aboriginal studies focusing on the reasons for residential moves are scarce, data collected by the 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey identified efforts to improve housing situations as the most frequently cited reasons for moving (Clatworthy, 1996). This finding, in combination with the high levels of core housing need shown above, suggests that the high rates of residential mobility which characterize urban Aboriginal children and youth flow from inadequate housing situations.

As noted previously, moving is generally viewed as an opportunity for households and families to bring housing consumption more in line with needs and resources. This raises an important question: To what extent does residential mobility among urban Aboriginal children and youth result in acceptable housing situations? This question can be addressed by comparing the prevalence of core housing need among comparable households who move (movers) and do not move (i.e., non-movers). The results of this analysis, summarized in Table 3 for urban Aboriginal families with children who were renting accommodation indicate that recent movers experienced higher rates of core housing need than non-movers in all provinces/regions except Nunavut. At the national level, roughly one half of renting families with children who moved experienced core housing need, a rate roughly 1.2 times higher than that of non-movers. Results for

other types of Aboriginal households revealed a similar pattern of higher rates of core housing need among movers. These findings, which were also identified in research based on 1991 data (Clatworthy, 1996), suggest that for a large segment of urban Aboriginal children and youth, residential moves do not result in acceptable housing situations. In light of the housing outcomes of movers, the high levels of mobility among urban Aboriginal children and youth are a concern and suggest that frequent mobility may constitute an additional dimension of the housing difficulties experienced by urban Aboriginal peoples.

Discussion and Implications

The finding that, for many young urban Aboriginal families, residential moves are not leading to improved housing situations, raises important issues for researchers and policy-makers about the housing experiences of urban Aboriginal children. First, housing difficulties among Aboriginal families are correlated with low incomes that can limit the housing opportunities available. Many families may be facing untenable choices, between dwellings of poor quality and/or insufficient size, or units that are unaffordable. It is this situation that appears to contribute to frequent changes in residence, as Aboriginal households and families seek to improve their housing situations; however the process of moving does not necessarily result in acceptable levels of housing consumption.[7] The outcome for the children of these families is a cycle of upheaval and poor quality housing that is compounded by other factors associated with living in poverty.

Although research concerning the consequences and implications of high levels of mobility among urban Aboriginal peoples remains poorly developed, a growing body of literature suggests that frequent moves, in certain contexts, are associated with detrimental outcomes for children, including Aboriginal children. A recent study (Clatworthy, 2000) identified annual student turnover rates at schools located in inner-city Winnipeg neighbourhoods with the Aboriginal population exceeding 50 percent, more than twice the inner-city average. At some of these schools, turnover rates approached 100 percent. Although this research did not attempt to establish the consequences of school changes on education outcomes, two other recent studies have found a significant correlation between student mobility and school outcomes. A US-based study, reported by the Government Accounting Office (1994), found that among American third graders who changed schools frequently, 41 percent of them were below the grade level in reading, compared to only 26 percent of third graders who never changed schools. The Government Accounting Office also found that frequent school changes were associated with poor math scores and reported behavioural problems.

A recent Canadian study by Aman (2006), concerning the impacts of mobility and school relocations on high school completion rates among youth (including Aboriginal youth) in British Columbia, produced remarkably similar findings, in terms of the link between high student mobility and poor school outcomes (See also Aman and Ungerleider in this volume). Among students who relocated schools, the high school completion rate was roughly one half that of students who did not change schools.

Perhaps most importantly, evidence regarding the negative impacts of frequent mobility, whether due to school change or residential moves, raises concerns of an intergenerational cycle, as low levels of education attainment likely translate into low incomes in adulthood, which in turn leaves people at higher risk of housing consumption problems. Given this risk, interventions to address the drivers of high residential mobility among young urban Aboriginal families, including factors pertaining to the housing supply as well as those related to poverty, need to be seriously considered.[8]

Notes

1 Recent migration research (Clatworthy and Norris, 2007) has shown that the Aboriginal population moves to and from urban areas at a rate roughly 1.5 times higher than that of the non-Aboriginal population.

2 The material presented in this paper draws on results from ongoing research sponsored by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation into the housing conditions and needs of Canada's Aboriginal populations living on and off reserves. Data presented in this study for the Aboriginal population include those who reported Aboriginal identity (i.e., North American Indian, Métis, Inuit), Indian registration, or band membership.

3 The residential mobility rates in this study are annual rates and are measured for the one-year period preceding the 2001 Census of Canada. These rates are calculated for the non-migrant population (i.e., those who resided in the same community in both 2000 and 2001).

4 The odds-ratio measures the likelihood of an event (e.g., experiencing core housing need) occurring among a specific population group (e.g., Aboriginal) in

relation to that of another population group (non-Aboriginal). A ratio equal to 1 indicates that the event occurs at the same rate among both groups. As used in this context, a ratio of 2 indicates that the event occurs twice as often among the Aboriginal than non-Aboriginal population.

5 Household-level mobility rates are defined on the basis of the residential mobility status of the household maintainer. Most residential moves, especially those involving married couples and families, generally involve all members of the household/family.

6 Tenure has been identified as a causal factor in residential mobility. This results from differentials in the costs of moving incurred by owners and renters. Those who own their home generally confront higher moving costs associated with expenses (e.g., real estate brokerage and legal fees) related to the sale or purchase of the dwelling unit.

7 While evidence suggests that many of those who move do not acquire acceptable dwelling units, moves may result in housing consumption improvements or improvements in other aspects of housing consumption, including better neighbourhoods, and improved access to work or schools. These issues cannot be adequately addressed within the context of census data.

8 Frequent mobility may contribute to other difficulties for Aboriginal children and youth, as some research suggests that high levels of mobility may also hamper socialization and reduce social cohesion. Frequent mobility may also negatively affect continuity in the provision of services to high-need families.

Full references are available in the online version of this issue. It can be accessed by visiting the PRI web site at <www.policyresearch.gc.ca>

Aboriginal Data: Opportunities for Future Research and Analysis

The articles contained in this volume were written in the period just prior to the roll-out of new sources of Aboriginal data. Data to be released during 2008 will present new opportunities to further explore research questions raised by contributors to this issue of *Horizons*.

Census Data

The 2006 Census offers a wide range of data tabulations on various topics. Demographic and socio-economic data on the Aboriginal populations of Canada are being rolled out between January and May of 2008. In January 2008, Statistics Canada published a first analysis of demographic data in an online document entitled *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada in 2006: Inuit, Métis and First Nations* <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/analysis/aboriginal/index.cfm>, 2006 Census <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/analysis/aboriginal/index.cfm>. Further analysis will be possible following other 2006 Census major releases.

Post-Censal Surveys

Statistics Canada, in collaboration with Aboriginal advisors from across the country, National Aboriginal Organizations and federal partners, has conducted two surveys involving the Aboriginal population living off-reserve: the 2006 Aboriginal Children's Survey (ACS) and Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS).

The ACS is a national survey of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children under the age of 6 that collects information on their development and well-being. The APS provides data on the social and economic conditions of children and youth aged 6 to 14 and for adults aged 15 and over for all Aboriginal groups across Canada. Data from both surveys are expected to be available to the public in the fall of 2008.

Labour Force Survey

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) provides monthly information on the labour market outcomes of off-reserve Aboriginal peoples.

Since January of 2007, Aboriginal identity questions in the LFS are now asked for all provinces; prior to that date data was only collected for select regions, notably western Canada. At present, only data for western Canada is available. However, national data should be available sometime in the fall of 2008. Visit Statistics Canada's web site at <www.statcan.ca> for more information about these products.

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